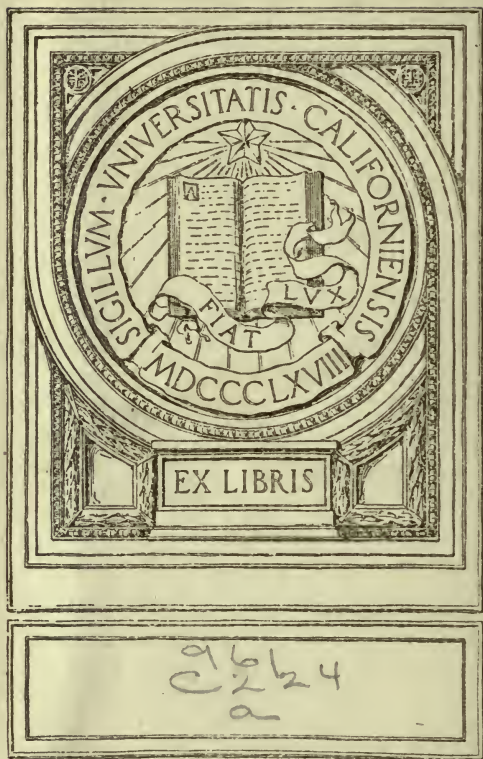




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ANNETTE AND BENNETT

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

LITTLE BROTHER
ROUND THE CORNER
THREE PRETTY MEN
THE STUCCO HOUSE
TIME AND ETERNITY
PUGS AND PEACOCKS
SEMBAL

Annette and Bennett

A Novel : By Gilbert Cannan

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"She had the grit to pray for Judas if she took the notion—there warn't no back-down to her, I judge."

HUCKLEBERRY FINN

LONDON: HUTCHINSON & CO.,
:: PATERNOSTER ROW ::

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THE HISTORY OF THE

REIGN OF

CHARLES THE FIRST

BY

JOHN BURNET

OF

THE

UNIVERSITY OF

OXFORD

IN

THE

YEAR

PREFACE

A MEETING IN NEW YORK

TEN years ago, in *Little Brother*, I published an account of my first acquaintance with Stephen Lawrie, that demoniac and unpredictable person, through the perplexed tribulation of M. M. Lawrie, his brother, who brought me what little coherence he had been able to make of a manuscript left by Stephen on his disappearance. Detecting in Stephen a first-class humorist, one of those essential spirits who create confusion wherever they go, I obliged his serious brother, did some further editing, and put my own trivial name to the work, little thinking that I in my turn would be possessed by Stephen's spirit for ten years and more, and driven by it to explore his nature and that of his family in a series of works so humorous that they were bound to be taken solemnly and abhorred for their grim earnestness. Humour and conscience are so closely knit together that I would almost say: "He that cannot laugh hath no conscience."

Things came to such a pass through my entanglement with these Lawries, and Stephen dragged me through such a deal of hot water, that at last I could endure it no more, withdrew from England and the eminent persons left over from the nineteenth century—(in the twentieth century there are no eminent persons, as there is no use for them)—and wandered for over a year through Europe, America, the Near East and the entire length of Africa,

until at last I plumed myself on being rid of Stephen and his daimon. Not a bit of it.

It is the habit of the English in a crisis to fall back on their stupidity, to see, feel, hear nothing until the inward or spiritual fact has become sufficiently external and respectable to be acknowledged. They divest themselves of all intelligence and, to secure themselves in their hibernation, starve, deride, scandalise, bully and spy upon the few sensitive and passionate men and women whom they produce by way of getting rid of them. They got rid of Stephen Lawrie as they got rid of Shelley and Byron and thought they had done it even more completely inasmuch as, except for *Little Brother*, he had left no work behind him. Tragedy had dogged him, as it dogs every humorist, as though Life, like the English, were intent on blotting out anyone who cannot help seeing the joke of it all, and the last I heard of him in the flesh was a tale of disaster entirely appropriate to the fatal year 1916 in which it occurred. After that he disappeared for the second time, but I was left with an uneasy feeling that I was not yet finished with him.

The number of thinking men and women in the whole world is so small that they would hardly populate a moderate-sized village. Thinking is quite a healthy and pleasant occupation, but it cannot be done in a crowd, and most people prefer to live in the multitude. They feel safer there, moving as the crowd moves. Other people, especially humorists, feel safer in solitude, and such people, needing sympathy, find each other out in spite of all the barriers of distance and language. So it was that Stephen Lawrie found me out and, when he first left England, threw the burden of his literary remains upon me: and so it was that, when he died in New York, I found myself once more saddled with a literary task which I had to tackle because it blocked the path to my own work . . . I have a conscience. I had a duty to

Stephen, neither particularly solemn nor sacred, but still a duty, and when he bequeathed to me his entire property, an almost undecipherable mass of papers, I put aside every other occupation and set to work upon a story which completed my own researches, so that you have here in *Annette and Bennett*, Stephen Lawrie's story of his great-aunt. An odd subject surely: but no man can write about the woman he loves, and yet——

"I am fully aware," said Stephen as he lay dying in his wretched loft in Fourteenth Street, "I am fully aware that for years I have been your own private joke, and that you have committed the error of making it public. You must see it through to the end, for at the end of every joke is a little door into the golden realm of wisdom. But, damn it, I am not going to make a speech. I am not going to repent and I am not going to confess. I am going to laugh and I should be happy if I could be sure that when people think of me they would just smile and, if only for a moment, upset the rigidity of their grotesque faces. A dead man's face is beautiful because it is so still, but a dead face being carried through the streets"

He was too ill to talk so much. There was, of course, a woman in attendance, a pathetic little creature who resented my intrusion and was jealous of his finding so much to say to me, for her very movements told how silent he must have been as he thought and laughed and wove together in his mind all the jokes of his career. He felt her jealousy and appeased it by asking her to bring him a glass of water and me a highball, which is American for iced whiskey and soda.

"You'll need it," he said, with a smile of such angelic sweetness that I was rather ashamed of myself, and felt, with a pang of horror, that I had never really understood him. The sweetness of the man was unfathomable, and through his suffering had gathered into itself a

strength which made him entirely incomprehensible to everyone—especially, I remember thinking, to women and to artists, among whom, as an uncommercial person, he must have lived.

He was a vagabond. He passed through people's lives and had his long sojourn in mine only by accident, but he is remembered and he is loved, and, as he wished, people smile when they think of him, as over a remembered tune that in recollection through the years gathers its full significance. I know of two men who love him far more than any woman can have done and, therefore, I say that his life was not a failure. His generation, as he said in his last words, had been wiped out and he had struggled on until he understood the reason of it all and could see the joke of it, and then he was content to go too.

He hated action and he loathed writing. He thought that nothing whatever was necessary but to understand, and if it were forced upon him to go through Hell in order to understand, then he would go through Hell, a process for which most of us have neither the time nor the toughness.

He asked me to be a little more careful with *Annette and Bennett* than I had been with *Little Brother*, and I promised that I would be.

"Thank you," he said, "This is the end of me. I hope I have been the best joke of my generation."

A tear trickled down my nose as I replied :

"I'm sure you have, old man. I'm sure you have."

So we clasped hands and parted, everything forgiven, everything understood.

G.C.

LONDON,

February, 1922.

CHAPTER I

MARY LAWRIE SEES THE QUEEN

FOR any other woman the journey would have been fatiguing, but to Miss Mary Lawrie, born in Galloway, trained in Edinburgh, and toughened by years of impoverished pilgrimage on the Continent of Europe, travelling by diligence or, when necessary, on her feet, the passage by train and steamboat from Paris to London was a trifle. If she was faintly disturbed between Dover and Calais it was from sympathy with the sufferers and not from surrender to the waves or the smell of the engine.

She had lived in various intellectual centres, had maintained herself by teaching English, by saving learned men the tedium of mining for information in national libraries, had contributed to a Scots encyclopaedia, had kept up an almost unfailing correspondence with her brother James Lawrie in Thrigsby and with the illustrious Andrew Burn in Edinburgh, and by dint of being reliable, had amassed in legacies a fortune of four thousand pounds. With this sum she was richer than the Rothschilds, for she owed no man a penny, and if her income had been ten pounds she would not, could not, have spent more than seven pounds ten shillings. She had had periods of semi-starvation and had found them not nearly so unpleasant as they are imagined to be by the over-fed.

She did not agree with Sterne. Experience had taught her that they do these things better in England, and she

had never wavered in her conviction that everything is done best of all in Scotland, for she had found that wherever there was need of a cool head and that ferocious honesty which is the only thing that can save the situation in a crisis, there in the pivotal position would be a Scotsman.

Dover. The dirty white-washed walls of England, a grey sea, low heavy clouds, and rain. The reason why governesses make one trip abroad and never go again is that it always rains when they come back. They let themselves be carried, chilled and numbed, to their homes, give the cabman threepence as the last tip of their great adventure, make tea and sit quite still, frozen and disappointed because England has not changed, nobody has missed them while they have been away, and all the wild elation of going up Pilatus has gone for nothing. England applauds the imperturbable.

Miss Lawrie's luggage was as meagre as herself. Her one good trunk made the customs' officer scratch his head when he opened it, for it contained nothing but letters and sketches made on her journeys. (She sketched indefatigably, using coffee when she had no colours.)

"Litt'ry?" said the officer.

"Sentimental," replied Miss Lawrie, with a twinkle in her small grey eyes.

He made his hieroglyphic on the trunk and turned to a crate which stood as high as herself; that is, a little more than five feet from the ground.

"Heavy," said the official.

"Statue," replied Miss Lawrie.

After years of the exhaustive Germans, the rhetorical French, and the operative Italians, this English monovalbalism was a delight to her, and she tried to give the officer twopence but he was too busy to take it.

As she had no definite plans she arranged for the statue

to be sent to the house of her brother, Mr. Thomas Lawrie, Guardian of the Poor, in the country near Thrigsby, knowing full well that of all the hatreds that possessed his massive frock-coated bosom that of art was the most powerful. The statue was a Psyche given to her by a sculptor in Rome whose son she had saved from running away with a Russian Jewess; for of all Mary Lawrie's talents she had that of being in the wrong place at the right time in perfection, and astute persons had made use of it on more than one occasion. Hence her legacies. . . . It was not obtuseness in her. It was a cool conviction of the unimportance of emotions which most of us ruinously exaggerate.

She accepted the statue, a lovely thing, for its practical value to herself, for she saw in it a portrait of what she would have given her eyes to be, of what, had she but possessed it, would have averted the wreck and ruin of her life which she had had to face in Edinburgh, where existence, apart from the admirable food, is as bleak and cold and cutting as the east wind bottled in the Forth.

London : the dear human London of the hansom-cab, of pretty girls and dandies in the clubs ; the London of St. James' Hall, and Maskelyne and Cooke, and Charles Keene : the warm, quiet city of exquisite genius that no one now remembers ; the London in which, as your hansom clopped and clattered through a quiet Square, you would see a door open to reveal a delicious girl, perfectly poised, healthy, untroubled, the serene human beauty that half-a-world laboured to create. . . . Mary Lawrie had the entrée to that London, although her friends were of those wicked Liberals who, even in the eighties, saw it threatened and laboured to preserve it, and were denounced by those who, blinded, could not dream that such ordained perfection could ever pass away.

Miss Lawrie, however, as became one who had loved and lost a Professor of Philosophy, was academic in her emotions, and the lyrical quality in London's beauty was lost upon her. London was to her a place in which she could, for a short while, be padded round with congenial society.

She was to stay with Sir Arden Stokes, to members of whose family she had taught German in Berlin, Italian in Rome, and French in Paris, until the little figure in black silk had become a part of the landscape of that acquisitive family. She admired their shrewdness and adored their distinction, though she deplored their wilful ignorance and deliberate blindness to everything that was not English. She had had three legacies from the family, and it was understood very well by everyone in it and employed by it that she was no longer in a semi-menial position. It was said that she had the brains of a man : it was known that she had the friendship of Professor Burn, and it was understood that she would presently enjoy an apotheosis into philosophy and the study of Dante, and this understanding made her the object of awe. The children whom she taught were made to feel that it was a privilege to be instructed by Miss Lawrie, the friend of Andrew Burn and of the Brothers Grimm who had "made" the Fairy Stories, not for their trumpery value as stories, but for their scientific importance.

Miss Lawrie was herself a kind of fairy story. She had a dramatic presence and touch which could hold and subdue and inform the children as no discipline could have done. She was rather terrible and mysterious, with her big face hovering above her little body ; but no one was afraid of her, though everyone, almost without knowing it, acknowledged her power, and was, perhaps, more aware of it than she was herself. She was too happy looking on, and also too intent upon the adventure

of her own family, to care about the ordinary Stokes business of turning opportunity to profit.

Besides, she regarded herself as a disastrous and comical failure, an oddity designed by Nature to punish her mother for her religious arrogance, and it amused her to find herself in her independence admired as a fore-runner, a pioneer of woman's education. She had a hand in the founding of Newnham College at Cambridge, and was consulted as to the position of women on the Continent; but she looked wise, her lips quivered with what was taken for humour, and she said nothing. There was nothing to say, for she did not believe that anything could be done for people who could do nothing for themselves. She who had spent her life in education had learned to suspect all institutions in proportion to their success.

Twice in her life she had fallen in love, with a passion so violent as in each case to alarm the object of it and force him to take refuge where he could. Most of us, in self-protection, are more or less in love with two or three people at the same time and carry on a subterranean existence of sentiment and sympathy which turns superficial living into a bearable joke. There are occasional people like Miss Lawrie and Jane Eyre (also a governess) who want their man, take aim, let fly, and—miss, and have no one to fall back upon except themselves. Such born spinsters have all the fury of married women who have lost interest in their husbands, with all the energetic curiosity, sentimentality, and capacity for devotion of a girl; and, for all that she looked so wonderfully the super-governess of the late Victorian period, Mary Lawrie was athrill with the feline electricity of a tigress prowling round and round her prey—the body and soul of Andrew Burn, M.A., LL.D., Hon. Litt.D. (Oxon.), Professor of Moral Philosophy in the University of Edinburgh. She prowled and stalked and howled in the wilderness of her

own being but was driven back, like the rest of us, to outward conformity with the apparent pursuits of civilised men and women ; but, in fact, like the rest of us, sought blood where she could find it. When you have found the woman,—*cherchez l'homme*.

“ I have a window for the children to see Her Majesty,” said Sir Arden at breakfast, a few mornings after Miss Lawrie’s arrival.

“ Indeed ? ” replied Miss Lawrie.

“ Loyalty is a good thing,” said Sir Arden. “ What a peaceful place England has been—compared with the Continent, of course.”

“ You would be surprised,” said Miss Lawrie, “ how little disturbance revolutions make.”

She had seen a few of them in her sojourn abroad.

“ Think of Russia ! ” said Sir Arden. “ When I think of Russia I could offer up a prayer of thanksgiving for the blessings of constitutional monarchy.”

Miss Lawrie’s lips worked with their appearance of humour ; but she was only comparing Sir Arden, to his disadvantage, with Andrew Burn, from whom she had that morning received a frigid letter of welcome back to her native island, of which she regarded the English as the inferior portion. She had been born and brought up in a valley from whose sterility a few hundred men and women managed to extract a living, though a herd of goats would have been baffled by it, and she found it difficult not to despise the ease and comfort of the English, of whom the Germans said that they had won their freedom by enslaving the East Indians, but even more she condemned the stupidity resulting from that ease and that comfort. Andrew Burn and Sir Arden became confused for a moment or two in her mind, and Miss Lawrie had a brief respite from her accustomed tension, during which it seemed to her that she could have her way. What could poor Sir Arden do against the passion that burned

in her? And ah!—ah!—how intelligible it made the ridiculous commotion that went on all around her as she realised that it is the general practice of baffled women to accept a substitute and even to create one, as she herself had been doing just now, out of the image of the desired and any bewildered fool or purblind egoist who turns up. . . .

Sir Arden, praising constitutional monarchy, looked at her over his spectacles, strongly disapproving of the Continental flavour she had brought into his unimpeachable household. She could not eat her breakfast as though she enjoyed it. This was due to the letter from Andrew Burn, but Sir Arden detected, or thought he detected, a preference for coffee and rolls, the early flirtation with hunger that makes the day on the Continent so flimsy.

Miss Lawrie sighed. Abroad it had been so easy, after a while, to think clearly, and to feel swiftly, and to enjoy every minute of the day that was enjoyable; but here—memories and associations were so powerful, people were so solid, so suspicious, so controlled, so certain of to-morrow; and the Queen would soon have been fifty years on the Throne, so long that change and mutability had been forgotten, and there were in the world only things that were approved and things that were anathema. Her thoughts took a queer turn and she said to herself, fixing Sir Arden with a glance that discomfited him: "If I had been beautiful, I should have been too wicked."

And in imagination she saw herself as a tall dark woman, of the style then fashionable, seizing Andrew Burn by the scruff of the neck, and shaking him until his teeth rattled and he began to whimper and promised that he would stop using her passion to help him over the difficulties and to reach the high spots in his work. Lectures and books indeed, and fame and worshipping pupils, when

he could have been —— ! Does a woman ever know what she wants to make of a man ? Does she ever want more than to conceive him and bear him and to make good the job that his mother has so botched ?

"She is a good woman," said Miss Lawrie, looking back out of her confusion.

"A model to all wives and widows," sighed Sir Arden.

"Though I am not sure," continued Miss Lawrie, not particularly noticing the interjection, "that such a large family is altogether a good example."

Her mind had flung from its darling, detested prime preoccupation to the thought of her brother James in Thrigsby, married, collapsed, responsible for a wife, three boys, a girl, and Tibby, though she, to be sure, could, if necessary, be cast adrift, illegitimate brat that she was, worming her way into a respectable family, and clinging to it until it began to cling in return.

Miss Lawrie's thoughts, if scattered, were vigorous, and it was this vigour that gave her to the indifferent outsider—and, be it remembered that we are all fundamentally indifferent to each other—the impression of compactness: a little black concentrated piece of humanity, a horribly important speck on the landscape like the Monarch whom she was being despatched to view.

Miss Lawrie never knew the occasion of the procession which she witnessed from the windows of the chambers of Pembridge Stokes, K.C., in Parliament Street. There were only herself and the children, a few clerks and their families. Loyalty was a good thing, apparently, for children and the people—somehow associated with education, since education had been incorporated in the constitution by the Act of 1870 . . . Miss Lawrie saw some soldiers, a carriage, more soldiers, and then she had a memory of a short, plump, large-faced figure, white-haired, black-bonneted, bowing stiffly and

awkwardly from the hips to right and left, as though to prevent the heavy staring eyes from falling out of the head, or to catch them if they fell. There were some Indians, too ; a lot of horses and policemen's helmets. . . . Miss Lawrie had seen the Queen.

CHAPTER II

MISS LAWRIE SEES CATHERINE

MEN are very mean in their cowardice and cowardly in their meanness. Miss Lawrie was successfully launched upon her London career, dining and lunching out, visiting the galleries, attending great nights in the House of Commons, acting as chaperon, wrecking romances right and left, when she received a second letter from Professor Burn, to whom she had written every day, announcing that he had been married for three years and was the father of a boy. Her lips worked like a clock and one of the Stokes girls swore that she could hear Miss Lawrie's teeth click in her head. The blow was mortal to her ambition and to her designs, for she had resolved to invest a thousand pounds, or even fifteen hundred pounds, in building a trap for her Professor.

Through Christopher North there was a traditional bond between Edinburgh University and the Lake country by Westmorland and Cumberland, and Professor Burn sojourned there every summer—a tremendous walker and something of a botanist. Through the Greigs there was a strong tie between the Lawries and that little corner of the Lakes sacred to the memory of Wordsworth. Indeed, no birthday or Christmas feast was complete in the family without a parcel of gingerbread from the cottage in the churchyard at Grasmere where the Rothay hurries to the trout-pool under the bridge. Further, the mountains of the Lakes had been

those Blue Mountains towards which the young Lawries had looked across the Solway when, in their dreams, they had had the world at their feet. It had been Miss Lawrie's goal since she first ventured out into the wicked world, and she had determined to build a house there to give her Andrew a footing in that famous region, to add to and crown its tale of illustrious men, and to lure him, since he would not fall in love with herself, to succumb to the comfort of a cottage of his own, built every stone of it, with loving hands as a temple to his genius. And now—Oh! odious, fatuous domesticity! He was married and a father and dwindled from the glorious thief of passion to a respectful friend!

Miss Lawrie spent two days in her room and said and thought little but Andrew, Andrew, Andrew! She missed a dinner with Mr. Gladstone and a drive through the park with Mr. Shaw Lefevre: but these men had shrunk into puppets compared with the titanic Andrew she constructed out of her disappointment. The comfort of London became odious to her and she thought for awhile of retiring to Rome, to her apartment on the top floor in the Spagna, where, if anywhere, she could forget ambition and energy, and Scots stubbornness, and the fatal terror of their own passion that set the Scots off thinking, and plunged them into stricken silence broken only by a tortured humour, blistering into biting jests that roused her to a fury. Andrew, in his quandary, had presented her with his marriage as though it were the supreme joke of the age. "I married a Miss Jean McVey three years ago."—*Embro'* no more! Miss Lawrie had planned to descend upon her brother at Thrigsby, by way of Edinburgh, the Glenkens and the Blue Mountains, retracing her steps, and finding her way back to the point at which she had started, in order, so far as possible, to balance her account before she set out upon the new adventure, which was to be the real adven-

ture of her life, that for which her wanderings had been a long preparation.

Her statue, sent direct from Dover to her brother Tom at Cheadley Edge, was not welcome. He wrote sardonically that "the naked woman" as he called it would be housed in his stable until she had decided what she was going to do with it, and with herself. It must have cost a fortune to bring such a thing all the way from Italy by rail, the heathen thing; Italian works of art, indeed; as though she had not already sufficiently overloaded her family with the engraved portraits of German philosophers and writers and philologists, which hung upon the darkly papered walls of their gloomy houses.

"A fine home-coming," thought Miss Lawrie. "Perhaps a single woman loses her head abroad; perhaps she expects too much when she returns; and perhaps a single woman is and must be out of it in any case."

Tom's letter hurt her and smashed her little pretence that she was glad of Andrew's marriage, glad of the relief he must have found from the long strain of the over-work in which he had indulged since, coming from the Manse, he had at once distinguished himself. She, too, was of the Manse—and what was Miss McVey? . . . Ah! How could she have fooled herself for so long, for so many, many years in pretending that Professor Burn in his respect for her abilities, had seen in her the more there was for him? . . . She would not have that. Her lips set in a grim triumph for she knew that she had frightened the philosopher and shaken him, almost broken him in the struggle that had taken place between them when she was young and he just groping out of youth. Memories grow keener with the years, and thwarted feelings gather up intensity. . . Would she have won more decisively if she had not been so absorbed in that other battle against her mother for the happiness and the brave soul of her glorious brother, Jamie, who

had sunk, poor fool, into the arms of a pretty English-woman, a child of the type that never becomes a woman, but, imperturbably bearing children, grows into a furious Tongue? Miss Lawrie thought of her sister-in-law as the Tongue, and so referred to her in her lighter and more caustic letters. When writing to Jamie she called her "poor Catherine."

Thinking of the stucco house as she had last seen it, she shuddered. Jamie would go through with it, thoroughly. That she knew and, in her bitter disappointment, she hated Jamie. If only he had been less lovable, she might have had more love to give, just the little more that makes all the difference between release and joy, and life-long smouldering captivity. On the other hand, she knew that she could not have sacrificed or broken the tie with him, no matter for what gain. He and she were camped against the brothers, Tom and John, and their sister Margaret, whose life had been one long offering of incense at the altar of success, the kind of success which is merely a matter of momentum, a belief that accumulated wealth and power can over-bear all opposition. . .

How elated she had been when Jamie went to America, how sure that he would return with some new force to raise himself and the strange power that he had in his impotence out of Thrigsby, out of the trap of commerce and the ascendancy that he allowed women to obtain over him in his furious sense of responsibility towards them, and his insensate curiosity about life—his mother, Tibby, the girl Fanny, his wife, anything young and helpless, boy, girl, dog, cat, suffering woman, could fasten on him and bleed him white. Miss Lawrie had, or thought she had, probed to the heart of her brother's tragedy, and now, in her disappointment, she was all the more bound to him, needing the comfort of the thought of him, and the living beauty that would not

be quenched in him. She had always with her a portrait of him as a young man, sensitive and serene, with a peace beyond understanding in his eyes; the Jamie who had wooed Agnes by the Lake and had been supplanted by the blindly successful Tom, who had wooed and won, not so much his wife, as her family.

These thoughts and memories filled Miss Lawrie with a nostalgia for her ain folk, the honest Scots wrestling with life, for its decency compared with the bland exploitation of it by such great ones as the Stokes', who had found in Charles Darwin their prophet and apologist. Charles Darwin or John Knox?

Unable to decide on any course of action Miss Lawrie went rummaging again and began to think in terms of houses: the Manse where she was born, the wee cottage by the sea where she and her mother had brought up the family, Andrew Keith's great house, and the mansions of the Greigs and the Allison-Greigs, her single room in Edinburgh, where, out of ten shillings a week she had begun to save, her room in Berlin and her balcony in Rome, Tom's cold and ugly house in Cheadley Edge, John's earnest ugly villa at Eastbourne, the stucco house at 29, Roman Street, Thrigsby, where Catherine sat enthroned, and last of all her own dream-house in the Lakes, snug in the arms of the Blue Mountains.

Her indecision at last became so painful that to escape from it she consented to return to work, and accepted a temporary post in the house of an Hon. and Rev. Canon of Westminster, in Dean's Yard, the only foothold of the Stokes' in the Church of England. (In the matter of religion Miss Lawrie compromised. She attended the Church of England with her pupils, armed and protected with a Prayer Book containing a rhymed version of the Psalms.) She was to prepare two girls for a finishing school in Brussels and instructed them in French and English literature and the rudiments of Italian.

In the quiet of Dean's Yard her perturbation had begun to ooze away when she received an alarming letter from Tom. The story of his having a statue of a naked woman in his stable was all over Thrigsby, and a set of ribald verses had appeared in the scurrilous paper for which his disreputable brother was known to write. He denounced his brother as a drunken debauchee and a hysterical play-actor who preferred the notoriety of scandal to the oblivion which he so richly deserved. . . "And I am keeping this scourge, this blight upon my family and my honour alive. I cannot imagine what you were thinking of when you sent your disgusting piece of Italian lasciviousness to my house. I am the talk of the place and all the old scandals are revived, Hubert, Andrew, the whole wretched business of the bad old days before we settled down to our position as the brains and the source of energy of the British Empire."

"Oh ! Tom ! Tom ! Tom !"

The letter concluded : "Why not have sent the infernal thing to James ? He and his friends could have had it set up in the bookshop where they read their bawdy books and concoct their abominable trash."

Alarmed, Miss Lawrie procured leave of absence and embarked upon the long journey to the remote and profitable North, where vulgar people maintained factories and became unaccountably powerful. Wishing to avoid Tom, she put up at the Worsley Arms, in a dingy little room looking on to the Infirmary Square. It rained as though it could never cease, the falling water every minute seeming to increase the weight of the downpour and the heavy humidity of the air. Grim black statues loomed on the wide pavements and little black figures hurried beneath them, splashing dismally through the mud as though they were trying to settle down in it like crabs. . . So this was what the bright-eyed, bright-souled Jamie was clinging to ; this was

what hypnotised him with pain so that he could not move. . . The bleak and black pile of the infirmary was dwarfed by the tall black warehouses that flanked it, and oh, the poor sick people lying prostrate in the din of the lorries on the granite cobbles ! The atmosphere of smoke and rain, the leaden sky low-hanging ! . . . All the same Miss Lawrie felt that she had missed something in her pleasant sojourn with easy, cultured people in swaggering Berlin and pleasant Italy.

She had told no one of her coming, and now that she had arrived, was not at all clear as to why she had come. There was a discrepancy between her imagination of the facts and the facts themselves. She was intruding. She had avoided the trials of her people and had been a blithe, wandering outsider. (Blithe is the very word : dour, canny, shrewd, even grim as she was, there was in her a blitheness that made her alarmingly intangible and impervious.) What, now that she was here, could she do, what could she say except that in such a slatey light things might seem intolerable, that in her own sunlit Rome could be laughed or whistled away ? She was sensible at once of the tremendous pressure put upon the human spirit in this place, and half realised with reference to her brother that, once felt to the core, as he would of course feel it, there could be no repudiation of it, no living that he could accept as living, without it, though it might mean damnation. There is no one like your fine-drawn Scot for moral responsibility.

Miss Lawrie went shopping. She bought for everyone a little present, a reticule for Catherine, a book on marine signalling for Robin, a knife for Mark, a box of paints for Bennett, a pair of mittens for Tibby, and for Jamie a tobacco-pouch. Then with postcards she announced her arrival to the Greigs and the Keiths, to Mr. Schwartzheim, German master at the Grammar School, a Berlin friend, and set off to explore Thrigsby as though

it were a town in Italy with ruins, historical remains and artistic treasures. She was something of a connoisseur in towns and liked nothing better than to drop herself into a place, to sense its life, and measure herself against its traditions and its force. Almost more than any other pleasure she enjoyed that of being alone.

A prodigious walker, she amused herself by seeking out the various offices, warehouses and banks with which her brothers and cousins had been connected, trying to build up a romance from their activities to balance that of her own career. She failed. The dirt and mud of the streets, the grey faces of the stunted, warped people hurt her, whose background was Italy, which, with some assistance from Goethe and Heine, she had understood and loved. What had they done, these hard, ambitious men? Factories, fortunes, politics. . . Yet somehow Rome, Berlin, even Edinburgh dwindled and she felt that she had missed too much, and might have had more strength and hope if she had gone through this—whatever it was—with the rest. But between herself and her mother there had always been jealousy over Jamie.

The little figure in black attracted no attention at the hotel until there drove up to its door the magnificent carriage and pair of old John Greig, the shrewdest and toughest of all the Scots who had had a hand in the making of Thrigsby, a magnificent patriarch with an enormous face finished by white whiskers, perhaps the best known and most influential man in the town. His card was left, Miss Lawrie being out, and when she returned, porters rushed to open doors, waiters bowed, the manager rubbed his hands round each other and there were flowers in her room by the open window, through which the soot and the smuts came pouring, oily smuts that sank into the napery and furred the lace curtains. . . And the next day the carriage and pair

came early in the morning to drive her out to Jackson's Range, to the house which old John refused to leave although the suburbs had swollen up to and round it. He had ten acres of grounds and splendid stables in which his hunters lived out a pampered old age.

He received his cousin in his dining-room, a brown and red munificence, where at eleven o'clock, he produced Madeira wine and Scots bun. Then he sat beneath his own portrait by the President of the R.S.A., firm of mouth, keen of eye, massive, and motioned Miss Lawrie to a seat at the long table, down which she looked with her lips working, for she felt so outlandish and so small.

"So you have come to look at us stay-at-homes," said old John. "Come peering for us through the smoke, heh? . . . Well, well, no smoke without fire. I had a great respect for your father."

Miss Lawrie started on that. She had almost forgotten her father, who had died when she was a child.

"A fine young man, that Thomas Lawrie—the eyes, and the head of him."

Miss Lawrie remembered her father's portrait.

"A divine," said old John, "and when I say divine I mean divine. You favour my cousin, your mother. . . . You could stay here if you like. Plenty of room. The idea of a single woman staying at a hotel. . . ."

"I have stayed in all kinds of places," said she.

"Abroad! Abroad is not England."

Miss Lawrie smiled. He had expressed a feeling which she had not been able to make clear to herself.

"I notice a great difference," she said.

"In England? Why yes, we are more liberal. We can afford it, though, mark you, we can't afford to have young men retire—like your brother Tom." The vigorous old man scowled. "I can't afford to retire, except into my grave. Fifteen minutes past eight every morning do I lay my hand on the brass plate with my own name

on it, worn, too, where I place my hand. Five days a week, and hunting or a drive on Saturdays. But these companies are ruining everything. I'd cut my right hand off rather than call myself limited—but these English will do anything rather than think or work. . . There was a brother went to Australia, was there not ? ”

“ Yes—my brother John.”

“ Aye, John. And made money and is for politics.” The old man chuckled.

“ And the wicked one ? ”

“ Not wicked, if you mean my brother James.”

“ There are stories, and if a man gets himself talked about he is wicked. He makes us all uncomfortable—which is good for us.”

“ Do you see him ? ”

“ I'm over old for meddling with the young.”

“ He has three boys.”

“ That worries you ? I've noticed that single women must aye be fussing over the young men. The wife's a tartar, eh ? ”

“ She's ruined him.”

“ A temper ? ”

“ I don't know. I think she is a good and stupid woman.”

“ You're a brave little body,” said old John, looking at her admiringly, “ to cross the Alps like Hannibal and conquer Rome—teach the French their manners. Been governessing Europe, heh ? You'll stay here two or three days and governess my household. You shall have the carriage and drive round to see your kinsfolk, rich and poor.”

Miss Lawrie thought it would make a fine impression on Catherine if she should drive down Roman Street in the rich carriage and pair.

“ I always walk,” she said.

“ An independent pair of legs ! And that's a Lawrie,

or a Greig or a Keith all over. He knows that he can always walk away."

His man, coming in, was ordered to show Miss Lawrie to her room, and to have her trunk fetched from the hotel. The little bit of a woman amused the old man, so full of energy and wariness she was.

His old age was as pampered as that of his horses. A great reader, it was not often that he could find company with whom to talk of his knowledge. He thought the younger generation, waiting for the money he had made, damned and was pleased to keep them waiting in vain, for his money was to go to the hospitals and to assist in the foundation of a University in Thrigsby.

The big empty house was honest and massive like the old man. He had paid his way through life, cash on the nail, his word as good as cash, had enjoyed himself and interfered with no one else's enjoyment, and had compelled the respect of his many enemies and the confidence of his few friends. He was not charitable. He had never asked for help, despised those who could bring themselves to do so, and took no interest in other people. He had always got more value for his money from horses.

With Miss Lawrie's trunk came a postcard from Catherine, written absurdly in French :

" Venez demain. Je serai enchantée de vous voir au thé, mais que faites vous à Thrigsby ? C. L."

Miss Lawrie smiled at the parade of knowledge and at the secretiveness which would not submit even so harmless a message to the postman. She wept over a terrible letter she had from her brother.

She ordered the carriage and was driven across the town, to the excitement of the children in the slums, to Roman Street, where, as she arrived, she saw Tibby peering through her little window above the door, and

Catherine's face looming through her large window on the ground floor. The steps had been cleaned, the door polished, the brass handle was shining, and as she waited, a handsome boy, pale and lean with excitement, came breathlessly up the pathway.

He bent over his arms and kissed her, and said :

" I'm Bennett."

Miss Lawrie smiled up at him.

" Of course," she said.

" Did you see the Pope in Rome ? "

" No. The Pope lives in the Vatican."

" I know. I know all about the Church of Rome."

The door opened. Catherine herself, seeing her son arrive and not knowing what he might not say to his aunt, came to cut his eagerness short. She looked at him and in a terrible voice said :

" Go upstairs and wash yourself, and show your hands and your ears to Tibby."

Bennett blushed and quivered and looked despair at his Aunt, and, half-weeping, rushed upstairs.

Miss Lawrie thought it wiser to say nothing, though her heart ached. She had come to fight for her brother, knew that it would be serious, and was unwilling to waste herself on this smaller issue.

Catherine led the way to her parlour, full of cabinets and knick-knacks, the mantelpiece crowded with little china figures, the windows closed and screened in from the street, with four or five tiers of plants in pots, aspidistras, ferns, cactus, heavily draped with thick lace curtains and fitted with green Venetian blinds. In the centre of the room was a chair of ebonised wood, covered with a hard cushion, and by this chair was a table on which were an unlit lamp and a hank of knitting with a ball of wool. A large tabby cat followed them into the room and as Catherine sat down took possession of her lap. She stroked it, and for several moments looked at the

meagre fire in the grate. Then, her mouth springing open with sudden violence, she said :

"I am not going to discuss my husband with you or with anyone else. One Lawrie is quite enough for me and I do not wish to have anything to do with the rest."

"You are an unhappy woman——" began Miss Lawrie.

"I am."

This was said with such vehemence that the conversation was snapped by it, and it was only after some time that Miss Lawrie could bring herself to say :

"I brought you a little present."

"You can keep it."

"Really—you should be proud of your handsome boy."

"Miss Lawrie, my father used to say that the Scotch and the Jews have been the ruin of Thrigsby, and the Scotch are worse than the Jews. If they don't drink they are stingy."

"Really—I came in the most friendly spirit."

"I have told Tom Lawrie what I think of him. They say he keeps a naked statue in his stables."

"As it happens, the statue is mine, and as it also happens I have not yet seen my brother Tom."

"Whose carriage is that, then ?"

"It is Mr. John Greig's. I am staying with him."

The collapse of Catherine's animosity was almost ludicrous. She knew perfectly well that no other member of her husband's family had penetrated to the august heights occupied by Mr. John Greig, and perhaps a score of worthies, and it was the source of one of her many bitter grievances against them that they all set a higher value upon themselves than the world would accord them.

"John Greig! That old man!" said Catherine, weakly.

"I am staying with him," explained Miss Lawrie tranquilly. She was beginning to enjoy herself now

that she had found a weak point in her sister-in-law's apparently impenetrable armour.

"A fine old man!" she said. "He still works and despises the new habit of retiring."

"One for Tom," snapped Catherine.

"Tom has his points, too, though of course he is not Jamie."

Catherine took up her knitting and jabbed viciously with her needle at the wool. It was one thing to quarrel with Tom, another to cross swords with this little old maid who had arrived so surprisingly in a carriage and pair, and seemed somehow to have soared among the great ones of the older generation.

"I will say this," said Catherine at length, "if anyone could bring James to his senses, it is you."

"I am not his wife."

Catherine winced, and cried out suddenly :

"Leave it alone! Leave it alone! You sit there with your hard reproachful face. You are like the rest——"

She quivered like a jelly, her handsome face took on a sulky pout, and her sister-in-law thought :

"She has had her own way : always she has had her own way. Jamie has been a fool, for as long as she lives she will never know what she wants—only to be admired."

The dead weight of the woman was terrifying. Her much flesh filled the chair in which she sat, and she was formless. Already her face was losing its outline, the skin under her chin had bagged, her eyelids were puffy and red, and her eyes had taken on the stupid crab-like stare of a dull old age. Across Miss Lawrie's mind floated the image of the Queen in her carriage, soldiers, the little formless figure, and more soldiers. She said :

"I saw the Queen in London."

Catherine bridled, and preened herself, and tapped regally with a fat hand on the chair.

"The poor Queen," she said. "The Prince Consort was such a handsome man."

Jamie came in, the fat hand stiffened and fell, and she bristled with hatred and jealousy as he moved over with his easy, dignified, slow grace, took his sister's hands in his, pulled her to her feet and kissed her. He looked tired and frayed and shabby, but his face shone with gladness, and the warm, simple friendliness that was his element.

"What a bit of a thing you are!" he said, holding her hands. "The family adventuress!"

A snort came from Catherine.

"You won't be staying long in Thrigsby?"

With an angry gobble, Catherine said:

"She is staying with old John Greig."

"Old John, aye? The old sport. He has lived to see his work go by—a damned proud old cock, who hates the lot of us."

Still he clung to his sister, breathing deeply the freshness that she brought into his house. She looked up at him in despairing helplessness, frightened by the agony on his face and by her own impertinence in thinking she could help him, for there was so much more weighing upon him than the furious enmity that came blistering from the woman, his wife, sitting there with her fat, futile hands, and her sloping lap yielding to the comfort of the cat nestled there. It was impossible to find anything to say to him, because there was so obviously no possibility of comfort. There was no childishness left in him, nothing to caress or spoil or wheedle with a "What is it, then?" He would not lie to himself or to any woman. There could be no subterfuge or compromise, and Miss Lawrie was ashamed of her own baffled, thwarted passion, and of her cowardice in having run away from failure, ashamed of it, little worshipper of success that she was, and through the years lying to herself in

pretending that there was any achievement in creeping, half-starved, from one capital of Europe to another.

The pregnant silence of the brother and sister was too much for Catherine. She gasped in her asphyxiation, for in his silence Jamie was too strong for her, and in his unquestioning acceptance of everything she chose to do to him, until to hurt him had become an unalterable habit with her. . . . At last she pushed the cat away from her, got up and, without a word, left the room.

"What is it, Jamie?"

He turned from his sister and paced slowly towards the window.

"She is my wife."

"I'm going to build a house, Jamie, in the Lakes. You can stay there with me."

He shook his head:

"I'd bring my ghosts with me."

She tried to laugh that off by asking him:

"What ghosts?"

"Ghosts and devils and the dead thoughts rotting in my brain."

"Oh! You should have gone to Edinburgh. This place is wrong for you."

His words lashed and cracked like a whip as he almost shouted:

"This place is right for me."

And then, in a gentle, beautiful voice he added:

"First of all, things happen in the soul, then in the spirit, and last of all, when they are almost spent, in common flesh and blood. There you have it. I shall not say so much again for many a long year; and my pen drips gall."

"Is it money?" asked Miss Lawrie, hardly hearing his words. "I have money. I will leave the building of my house, and you shall have it. If there were money, she would——"

"She and I," said Jamie, with a grim intensity, "she and I are at one in this thing, anyway, to go through with it as it is. A thick emotion breaks and spills upon the ground, but hammer it out fine and it will endure through everything—I am afraid of you, Mary, for you make me talk too much, too easily, and words—words—words——"

He could not finish, drew his hand across his eyes, and said :

"Some day when I am old, I shall understand it all, and I shall die of laughing. . . No, no, Mary, build your house, and live there with your old maid's dreams and love."

"And the boys ? "

"Robin's done for, Mark's a fool, and Bennett——"

"I saw Bennett at the door."

"He'll be whispering upstairs with Tibby. He's a genius, but as weak as water, and will never trust himself an inch away from the women."

CHAPTER III

BUILDING A HOUSE

ABOVE the top-most fork of a sycamore tree, as high as a very small boy of ten could reach, the initials S.L. are carved. Stephen Lawrie never had much care for houses, though he could understand what a house might mean to a woman. He was the most outrageous joke of a family of humorists; and his affections clung tenaciously to the odd house built by Miss Lawrie in her stubborn endeavour to straighten out the kink that had appeared so unaccountably in the fortunes of her family. It was a little house of stone, planted in an acre field in which were two enormous outcrops of rock, green with moss, and cloven by the elements. The eminent architect who built it has left on record the despairing resolve to which he was reduced—never again to do business directly with a woman: she must have a solicitor, or an agent, or a husband. Miss Lawrie changed his plans, countermanded his orders, altered his front door, so that when the change was made there was no room in the house for the staircase. This problem solved with a makeshift and a waste of space, she decided at the last moment that she must have an attic in which to keep her papers, sketches, and trophies of travel. This done, the staircase was again found to have been forgotten, and a movable ladder had to be invented to stand upright when not in use, so as to leave some space in the little room that had to be taken for it. . . . An

ugly house, without proportion or shape or character, but a funny house, squatting beneath a little mountain, hiding away bashfully behind a screen of oak and ash; yet a decent house, an old maid's house, remote from trouble, removed from bitterness and rage, a house built for books and letters—and a statue of a naked woman.

Stephen Lawrie—who will be kept in the background as far as possible—had only to close his eyes to see the white front door open, himself descending from a farmer's cart, the little bent, old figure in black silk appear, the kind, grey, wrinkled face twinkling sweetness through its pale grey eyes, and nodding, as the pale lips worked, to shake the wings of the white mutch that covered the thin grey hair on the square head that had seen through the illusions and deceptions of so many, and yet through none of its own, for to the end of her days Miss Lawrie believed in greatness and great men. Her house, indeed, so a malicious kinsman said, was a mausoleum for the memories of those whom she had known; but malice is stupid, superficial and without comprehension.

It was *her* house, her very own, and, though she had been a longer way round than any of her brothers and sisters, she alone of them had fulfilled her ambition, one so natural and so evident that she could be contented in it, see it in the round, and use it for the benefit of others. In the summer the house belonged to boys and girls. In the winter, during the long, dark splendid months of storm and snow, it was her own for lonely brooding, deep understanding and probing into the lives with which her own was interwoven, piecing together the hints and unconscious revelations that came to her in the correspondence that streamed in from every quarter, from Edinburgh, and from London, from her pupils as they passed through Oxford and Cambridge to high places and the professions, and from Thrigsby where her dearest suffered and endured.

The whole story could be told (but not understood) in a picture of Stephen, brooding and waiting in his sycamore tree, and Miss Lawrie brooding and waiting in her house. Form and truth blossom into flowers, live for a moment, then are gone, having brought significance into nonsense, simplicity into confusion. A little old woman and a small boy understood this very well, and knew that there was nothing to be said about it, but to live safely in silence while the growing tragic fury raged round them. Both loved the mountains and the beech and the waterfall, and the rocky outcrop in the acre field, for both in human beings looked for such an outcrop.

She began by loving Stephen for the passion that her brother and his grandfather had for him, but, as always with him, she was forced to know himself *sans phrase* and without the disguise of the affections of others. He gave her the key to the riddle over which she had been poring years before he was born. He was, to her, like some precious magnetic metal forged in the pressure of her brother's tragedy, and she understood, as did no one else, that the more he was left to himself, the better. . . . A strange composite he was, with the eyes of his great-grandfather, the Rev. Thomas Lawrie, the head and nose of his grandfather, and the fine sensitive jaw of his mother, Annette, whose quality of ease and gaiety and goodness made him a living contradiction in terms.

Stephen did not know himself how he managed to get his own way, but manage it he did, and spent his childhood mostly at the stucco house with his grandfather, or in the sycamore from which he could see Miss Lawrie's house, while the beck beneath him sang and gurgled like the joy within him, pouring itself out in a river of dreams. He did not need to know the details of the story in which his childhood was bound up.

He knew the course of it and he knew that he was free of it long before those who had been involved in it knew that there had been fulfilment, and that they were bound no more. He knew, too, what love it was that gave Miss Lawrie's hands and rugged features their abiding peace and sweetness, knew that it flowed through him, and had its aim, its purpose which it would attain in spite of every Hell of rage and spite that might be let loose in a perplexed and driven world. He knew this in the stillness of the power that it gave him, but could find no means of letting others know, all the poor others clinging obstinately to a needless suffering—needless, since there had been suffering enough, borne for them bravely and with laughter. He knew that it was futile to attempt to translate the agony of the spirit into terms of flesh and blood. That way lay bloodshed and death, impotent and sterile.

He lived very like a bird in those days, swinging in the tree-top, rapt in the swaying of the tree, and the wind in the leaves, and the only just audible song of the leaves as they breathed in the life of the wind and the soft sweet light of the mountain air. He would float down when he was hungry, swinging from branch to branch as easily and unconsciously as one will trip down the familiar stairs of a house, and in Miss Lawrie's house at meals he would sit in silence, or, if he was questioned, would lie serenely, because it was less trouble to invent a series of adventures than to try to remember what he had in fact been doing. Bathing was important to him, and fishing, but the polite activities into which he was inveigled through the kindness and courtesy of Miss Lawrie's neighbours, bewildered and hurt him. It seemed to him that people were most stupid and most false when they were kind, while boys—and the valleys swarmed with boys—boys with their swaggering ritual and endless empty chatter, reduced him almost to a

state of idiocy, in which he so exasperated them that they would beat him, or stone him, or throw him into the lake. Perhaps from his grandfather he had absorbed too much of the wise aloofness of old age.

"Your grandfather," Miss Lawrie would say, "was the most handsome man I ever saw." And she would make Stephen stand in front of the drawing she had of Jamie, and turn to the engraving of Christopher North on the next wall, so that the boy should understand what kind of men used to come out of Scotland.

"He walked from Oxford to London in a day."

"Who? He?"

"No. The other one. . . Professor Wilton."

She very quickly gave up trying to educate Stephen in the ordinary way. He could not, or would not read, but he responded, almost too violently, to names and to pictures, and, curiously, when Stephen was with her she felt closer to her beloved brother than she had ever done through the course of their two long lives. Her thoughts would become young and exciting again, and while Stephen sat absorbing a book in the evening, she would sit creaking her toes in her kid slippers, brooding and planning for the great days that were to come.

Nobody ever knew what Stephen was thinking about. He did not know himself, but he did know that he was thinking with a violence that sometimes nearly killed him, and would sometimes overcome him on the most awkward occasions, making him incapable of attending to the business of the moment, whether it might be talking or walking, or listening or playing cricket, or swimming. He could never explain himself, and when awful things happened through a disastrous failure at some crucial moment in which others were involved, he learned to bear the consequences with an inexhaustible patience which had its origin in a fundamental lack of interest. All the same, existence away from his grand-

father and Miss Lawrie was painful. They seemed to understand what was going on in him, and never expected or asked him to engage in any other occupation than this, of which, because it was so strange and seemed to be so unusual, he was secretly proud and superficially ashamed. He did his best to ignore it, because in people of his own age it roused a sudden and inexplicable fury, and they would beat him or devise some horrible torment for him, but to their constant indignation he always managed, without seeking it, to win the good opinion and the affection of their elders.

Miss Lawrie, like everyone else, had to put up with theory about him, and she hovered continually between two notions concerning him—that he would die young, and that he would become as great a figure in the world as Andrew Burn, than whom she could imagine none greater. The small boy and her great man were joined together in the depths of her affections, and he stepped into the room in her life and her house vacated by the innocently truant Professor. No one suspected this, Miss Lawrie hardly suspected it herself. There was always an element of charity in kindness to Stephen, about whom, even as a child, there hung an aura of doom or destiny, an impersonality which held out no promise of a return on any emotion or thought expended on him. It was felt to be safer to kick him when the irritation of his existence could no longer be ignored. Somehow this prolonged and increased the soreness of his family at the disgraceful failure of his grandfather.

It is said that fools build houses for wise men to live in and Miss Lawrie's house was for years a by-word in the family. It had cost her far too much and, as an investment, it was hopeless, because no one could, or would live in the Lake Country except in the summer months.

The damp, the cold, the rain, the rain, the rain, made

it impossible for anyone but lodging-house keepers, farmers and shepherds to live among the terrifying, useless mountains, and the farmers and shepherds were always committing suicide, while the wretched parsons buried in the valleys drank themselves imbecile in their poverty. Until Stephen appeared on the scene Miss Lawrie was more than half inclined to agree with them.

Jamie never came near the place, preferring to maintain his singular relationship with his sister through correspondence. He agreed with everyone else that her building the house was a mistake ; but then, he was of the opinion that life, the only house in which he had any interest, can only be built with mistakes, acknowledged, mastered, moulded into form. He was delighted when he learned from Stephen that he only ate and slept in Miss Lawrie's house and lived in the sycamore tree, and he just laughed at the names of the learned and distinguished men and women that she loved to parade as the enormous advantage that Stephen had in staying with her—Bishops, academicians, judges, dons, barristers, authors and authoresses, members of the great Liberal middle-class families that were producing brains with which to pepper the rather dull glories of Imperialism and the somewhat tarnished triumphs of scientific research.

Jamie used to laugh until the tears ran down his great nose. He saw what was coming, what indeed had already happened, that the game of Greatness had already run its course, that the human mind was changing, and sooner or later would have to admit the error of all its conceptions, the futility of all its ways. He saw, too, that in the mass what he perceived was already felt, and that men and women everywhere were cowering deeper and deeper into their homes for protection against the storm and to hide away from each other their own nakedness and poverty of soul. Yet there was no one to whom he could unburthen himself except his grandson, with his extraordinary power

of surrender to love, which accordingly was poured out on him with a desperate ferocity, both in the stucco house which his grandfather had tried to burn down and in the house which Miss Lawrie had built.

Like all children, Stephen made pictures of events as they were told to him, and he saw vividly James Lawrie piling faggots against the house in which he lived, and Miss Lawrie piling stone on stone of her shieling beneath Helm Scar. Like his grandfather, Stephen took no particular interest in events. He was concerned with persons. When things happened they came as an explosion, which, as a rule, he had anticipated. There was nothing to be excited over. As a rule an event meant pain, relief in tears, and a new beginning with complete forgetfulness without rancour or hoarded memory. Only persons mattered, so much indeed that there was no room for criticism. To both the ageing man and the small boy persons were marvellous, and though Miss Lawrie regarded her house as the summit of her family's achievement—(so that in her reluctance to leave it she lived to be ninety-five in a growing scepticism as to her Heavenly Father's ability to provide her with a better mansion in Heaven)—yet she could never convince Jamie or Stephen that there could be a more marvellous house than the stucco house.

It was the *house* par excellence, if you define a house as a place in which you sit until all your secrets are drawn out of you and the very walls and doors and pictures know more about you than you do yourself. It enveloped and gripped you and relieved you of all possibility of being anything but yourself and of taking any interest in events. Only people mattered, and it was curious how they gained in size and importance when that terrible front door was opened and they were greeted and admitted by Tibby's long, haggard countenance, and Catherine's large, peering, shrimp-pink face. They looked very small again when they went out into the street and turned either up the hill

towards the library, or down the hill towards the iron-girder bridge that led into an ashen wilderness.

Never again and nowhere else in an unusually adventurous life did Stephen find so keen a sense of the significance of life, death and love and suffering as in that house. Love especially was overpowering. His grandfather's love absorbed him, drank him, ate him, wrapped him round and round, battered him, rocked him, crooned to him, crept into him, made him more than himself, gave him more lives than his own, filled him with the sum of all the loves, happy, wretched, thwarted, baffled, of a life brimming with passion. And Catherine, too, loved him in her way, a jealous, suspicious way that watched his every movement and enquired into, but never, never understood what he did with the man who had ruined her life, the man whose hopes therefore she was pledged to trample in the dust. Stephen for a long time had an idea that Catherine had built the stucco house and that Jamie had tried to burn it down, and that it stayed where it was somehow because of himself. It all happened before he was born, and he was born because of it, his birth having had very little to do with his father and mother. All that was a little confused but very terrible and inevitable, so that he had no desire to escape from it.

The stucco house was a real house, while Miss Lawrie's was only a shelter to provide him with a covering not to be found in his sycamore tree. After all, the stucco house contained the people (including the things) that he belonged to, and where else in the world could you find such wonders as Jamie, and Tibby, and Catherine and Uncle Robin and Uncle Mark and Aunt Phoebe, and the cats, Susan and Solomon, and Mrs. Price, the charwoman, and the dominoes and the sewing-machine in the dining-room, and the books and the swords in Uncle Mark's room, and the ships in Uncle Robin's room and the four-poster and the bed on which Uncle Mark had had

rheumatic fever on a water-mattress, and the broken organ and the Noah's Ark and the walking-sticks and the prie-dieu in the attic, and the nasty greasy sponge in the bath-room, and the medicine bottles and the smell of eucalyptus that announced Catherine's presence, and the Uncles and the Aunts and the Cousins who came and went, little unimportant people from London and Scotland and Oxford and coal-yards, and cotton-mills and banks—inferior banks to be sneezed at because they were not Cateaton's, just as people who were not Lawries, even Lawries who did not belong to the stucco house, were to be despised.

Building a house might be important to a flighty, ambitious person like Miss Lawrie, but you could hardly be said to exist unless you belonged to something like the stucco house which had always been, had come into being like the world in Genesis, and surrounded you even in a swaying sycamore above a singing beck from which you could look down on a little house that was made by a foolish spinster and not begotten in agony and blood. What was Professor Wilson? What were Archbishops and authors and men of science? What the Brothers Grimm and the Deutsche Rundschau? Stephen could only allow Miss Lawrie's house to be a house because it contained, just inside the front door, a portrait of Jamie, young and beautiful and full of the tenderness of vision.

CHAPTER IV

ANNETTE AND BENNETT

As for his father's house, there was no such thing. There had been a cottage in the country, but nothing there was important except the pump and the earth closet under the damson tree : the one because Stephen cut his head open on it, and the other because it marked the place where the world began in Billy Lomas' field. Stephen understood very early and very completely that his father and mother had nothing to do with the world and very little to do with their children. They loved each other and took no interest in anything else. The children did not even really have birthdays, for Bennett always celebrated, ordered and directed them, and it was as though in giving presents he had bought them for his wife to give to himself. A child would be born in Stephen's absence at the stucco house, he would go back to find another brother or sister playing with his mother during the day until his father came back from town at night, and then his mother belonged to his father and the day's unreality was over. His father would be cross or not cross, but either way it made no matter. If his father were cross there would be words and kisses. If he were not cross there would be kisses without words, a silent, simple mystery, whose privacy no one could invade . . .

No ; there was no house in that life, which was altogether too simple and remote. There was a succession of places in which babies were produced, and to see them

there appeared persons from the external world, who looked on, felt ill at ease, and went away. Stephen understood their feelings because he always had them himself. The place where his father and mother lived belonged to them and they wanted nobody else, except the doctor—a little quiet man with a very sweet voice and extremely thick glasses accentuating the rather foolish prominence of his eyes. He belonged to the place, wherever it might be, and was often there even when nobody was ill, which seldom happened, for when there was no new baby there would be measles, or mumps, or scarlatina, or chicken-pox or diphtheria, or father would be laid up with an "attack." There may have been other events, but Stephen knew little of them. Absorbed as he was in the life of the stucco house he knew little of Bennett, his father, and Annette, his mother, and what he knew was tinged by the view taken of them by his fellow-inmates, most of whom disapproved.

One of the worst jolts suffered by Stephen in a very bumpy life was given him one day when his mother came to see him (as he believed) at the stucco house. Tibby told him she was coming, and he was all aflame to show her the wonders of the place so full of eternal and monumental spectacles, from Catherine enthroned in her chair to the filter in the scullery. He was cleaned and washed until his face shone and, as always when there were visitors, set on the sofa with a bound volume of *Punch*, while Catherine sat and twirled her thumbs and made the little smacking noise with her lips that every now and then produced an outburst of irritation from Uncle Robin and Uncle Mark. The door-bell rang, and Annette appeared, timidly but bravely. Her sweet voice asked if Stephen had been a good boy, and Catherine said :

"He is always a good boy."

Annette produced a box of chocolates and said she was

very glad and, sitting by his side, asked him if he would not like to come home. He felt that home was very far away, so far that his eyes filled with tears at the immense idea of distance with which it overcame him, and he was in such pain that he could not reply.

"He is very well here," said Catherine, "and he keeps his grandfather in order."

Annette took Stephen's hand in hers, and the two of them sat staring at Catherine as at something utterly foreign in which they could not believe. Stephen thought that his mother and he, sitting there, were very small, and that it was unfair that Catherine should be so large and so old without being in the least venerable.

"I hope you are going to be sensible," said Catherine, and the words sounded very terrible.

"I'm afraid we Folyats haven't much sense," replied Annette briefly. "My eldest brother is an artist, and one of my sisters married an artist and they went to London without a penny. Bennett is so clever. He can do anything. He can write and paint and draw and act and he is always inventing things."

"He already owes me and his brothers more than he has any hope of paying."

"I didn't know that," said Annette, a little dismally.

"I should hope not, indeed; as if any man working for his family would let his wife know how he stood."

Annette sprang up on that, giving Stephen's arm a wrench that nearly dislocated his shoulder. She stood flaming and quivering, her wide mouth open and gasping for the words that would not come.

"If you complain of the poverty which you have brought on him and on yourself—stop having children."

Annette sat down again, and said very quietly:

"Bennett and I do not know and don't want to know anything about such things."

Stephen did not understand what it was all about, but

he felt ashamed because it was assumed on both sides that he did not understand. Catherine tapped with her Jemima-clad foot on the floor and he could see the much flesh of her enormous calf shake. He disliked her very much at the moment because during the last week his Aunt Phoebe had had a friend staying in the house and he had had to sleep in his grandmother's bed, perched high up on the slope which she made with her bulk in the feather mattress.

"Disgusting," said Catherine, with a snort; and Stephen agreed with her.

"My mother had eleven children."

"And nicely they have turned out. You have all these children . . ."

"Five."

"You are still young, and you little women *never* stop; and here you are wanting Bennett to throw up the little means he has. Can your own family help you?"

"No."

"Not with the airs your mother gives herself. Airs are expensive. Look at me—tied to the house until I am ill. Do I have any pleasure? I can't even go to church. Yet Bennett can take you to the theatre."

"Mr. Lawrie sends us seats."

"O! Ho! Haven't I forbidden Bennett to have anything to do with his father!"

"You haven't forbidden me,—and you durstn't."

Annette gripped Stephen's hand tight. He tried to get it away. He did not like this quarrel and objected to being drawn into it. His fidgeting irritated Annette, and she shook him.

"You durstn't!" Annette continued. "And you durstn't say to my face the things you say behind my back, poisoning my husband's mind against me. You wicked, jealous woman, and you sha'n't have my Stephen, my poor, delicate, dainty boy, to make your hell of a house

bearable to live in. You'd make him ashamed of his father just as you have made Bennett ashamed of his. . ."

Stephen began to blubber. He had been dragged well into the thick of it, and the pain of it was intolerable.

"Leave the room, Stephen!" cried Catherine. "And how dare you come and say such things to me in my own house, and upset your own poor angel, ailing child."

"Good God! Good God! Good God!" said Uncle Robin, who had come in just then. "What a wailing of women's voices! One could hear you half down the street."

Catherine began to mop her eyes.

"She comes here and insults me in my own house."

Robin fussily poked the fire and stared rather stupidly at Annette, who was gulping down her fury. He stammered out at length:

"You don't know what terrible things you say, Mamma. I'm sure Annette didn't come here to quarrel with you. I'm sure she didn't. Now did you, Annette?"

"Indeed I didn't."

"There you are. You women quarrel because you have nothing to say to each other. I like Annette, Mamma. We all like you, Annette. Indeed, I've often said that if I could find a wife like you I'd get married myself. I've often said that. It isn't your fault that your brother committed suicide and that your sister . . ."

His voice trailed off into a feeble mumble.

"Really," said Annette, "if I'd been older and had had a good look at his family I never would have married Bennett, never."

"There you are!" Catherine burst into a roar.

"For God's sake, Annette, hold your tongue," said Robin. "You know how it is with her. She's hurt and frightened and there isn't one of us in this house who wouldn't give his eyes to be with you and Bennett and the children."

The affair had become altogether too grown-up for Stephen, who had crept away. Uncle Robin always rather terrified him ; he was so awkward, and mysterious and nervous, thin and lean, and crazily quick in his movements, doing and saying everything with a passionate absorbed emphasis. Besides, Uncle Robin had a beard, and, when he kissed you, his head darted out of his collar like a tortoise and his pouted lips made a wet mark on some absurd place like your ear or your eye or the tip of your nose ; and whenever he asserted himself and stood up and talked as he was doing now, he spread a darkness and a desolation.

Stephen found it hard to get away. He was all dressed up and cleaned for the visit and was put out by its failure, and thought there would be trouble if he did not put away his volume of *Punch*. Trouble with Catherine was very serious, because she never forgot or forgave. It was so serious now that Stephen, having escaped from the ominous room into the hall, could move no further, but stood listening to the dreadful voices and the still more dreadful silences, after the most overwhelming of which he heard Annette say that she could not go, as Bennett was coming to fetch her ; but that when he came she would go, and never set foot in the place again. This was calamity and devastation, and Stephen slipped out of the front door, which, with an immense effort, he could just open, and ran down to the gate to wait for his father to warn him of the trouble in store for him. But when Bennett appeared he could not make him listen ; because, though he was bursting with his premonition, he could not say what it was, and the only thing he could think of was that his mother would be sent to have her tea with Jamie and Tibby in the kitchen.

That, however, did not happen. Uncle Mark arrived almost at the same moment, and he was in a great hurry because he had a special choir-practice, and his hurry

swept the calamity into the background. Uncle Mark was more important than anyone else, because he was the man in church who came down to the altar steps with a big brass plate and collected the money in the little bags passed round by the gloomy gentlemen who were called sidesmen and churchwardens.

There were shrimps for tea, and Stephen always found that thrilling because it was a marvellous sight to see Catherine pick and eat them. Her plump pink hands, arched in the most genteel fashion, plucked and pressed at the little scaly fish and produced the dainty morsel clean, so that marvellously she never had to eat hard scales and legs ; and every now and then, as a mark of favour, she would hand, on an outstretched palm, one of her pickings to a struggling member of her family, generally with the remark :

“ These shrimps are so good. I must really pot some. There is no place like Southport for shrimps.”

Then someone would say :

“ Didn’t Aunt Emma die at Southport ? ”

And Catherine would reply :

“ Yes. John killed her. She should have stayed in Madeira, but he had business in London and so George was born at sea, and she died when she reached home. I had to lend them Tibby. They don’t remember that now. Ungrateful ! But then John has only one lung, and invalids are always selfish.”

Conversation at that table was apt to repeat itself, and it was nearly always concerned with people whose names by repetition became familiar. Mention of a place would bring up a whole family whose doings would be repeated and disapprovingly emphasised.

Uncle Mark had a very long neck and a pale thin moustache and a very deep terrifying voice which cowed even Catherine, and it was because he could subdue her that Stephen was afraid of him. Indeed, with Uncle

Mark, Catherine was abject, doting on him, looking fearfully at him with her little keen eyes as though she would die if she could not divine what he was thinking and anticipate his next wish. If he complained of the meal set before him, she would bestir herself to set it right. Everybody else had to wait on her.

A thin, straight nose he had, gold pince-nez with a silk cord that drooped through his moustaches ; but no face, only a kind of paleness that made Stephen dread to be alone with him.

He was especially awful on this day when he was in a hurry. He said his tea was horrible and tasted of paraffin. He was very particular about his tea, taking it without milk or sugar, and had his own little pot and his own cup with a contrivance to keep his moustaches dry, for, as he condescended to explain to Stephen one day :

“ Nothing is more disgusting than a man sucking his moustache.”

Annette took his tea-pot and had nearly reached the door when Catherine sprang to her feet and, without a word, but with a furious look, took the tea-pot and went to the kitchen herself. Uncle Mark laughed and said :

“ She thinks you have your hands full with Bennett.”

Annette returned to her chair opposite Uncle Robin and said :

“ Well, one of you is quite enough. What is the Anthem on Sunday ? ”

“ Stainer in G,” said Uncle Mark ; and Stephen, utterly at a loss, stared at him, wondering how this meaningless conversation could go on in face of the awful calamity that had happened. Bennett, as always, sat in silence. He had been placed, appropriately enough, between his wife and his mother, and drooped and wilted away in a miserable absent-minded silence, only picking up when Uncle Mark said cheerfully :

“ Aunt Maggie is dying.”

"Who says so?" asked Bennett.

"Phoebe. She has been staying with her."

Stephen knew nothing about Aunt Maggie except that she had a wig, and he was thinking dreamily about that, when Uncle Mark said :

"I don't suppose we need worry. She won't leave us anything except her wig. Mamma has said such awful things about them all that we have to suffer for it."

"I won't have you saying things against Mamma," flashed Uncle Robin, from the book which he had propped against the cruet. "This is *my* house."

"It is in your name," snapped Uncle Mark.

"I am the head of this family—the eldest son of the eldest son."

"*This* family!" groaned Bennett. "*This* family!"

"And what, pray, is wrong with this family?" asked Uncle Mark, stretching out his long neck with his moustache bristling. "After all, we don't murder our wives, and we don't air our private lives in public like some families."

"We don't get on," said Bennett, feebly.

"Who wants to get on?" thundered Uncle Mark.

"Look at the people who do get on!"

Catherine came back scarlet in the face, probably with rage. She put Uncle Mark's tea-pot in front of him and said :

"Mark, will you please speak to your father? He has insulted me and Doctor Clennam."

"It is my place to do so," said Uncle Robin.

"No," cried Catherine. "You cannot keep your temper."

"Let it wait," said Uncle Mark. "Let it wait until I return from choir practice, and Annette and Bennett and the boy are gone."

Stephen laid his head on his plate and began to weep. He did not want to go. All this grown-up fury was

making his head ache, and he understood very well that when he went, terrible things happened to his grandfather.

"The boy is not going," said Uncle Robin. "If the boy goes, you know how it will be."

Annette protested :

"It isn't fair."

"You can't make him feel how abominable he is in any other way." That word "abominable," booming from behind Uncle Mark's moustache, was overpowering. His pallid lack of face became a cold horror of judgment that reduced everything to ashes.

Annette said :

"If I take him home he just cries quietly all day long and doesn't eat, and he upsets the others."

Stephen did not understand that she was talking about himself. He was finding comfort in saying inside his head, some words that his grandfather had taught him long ago :

Pretty, pretty Robin
Near my Bosom.

He said them over thrice, a little unctuously like a preacher mouthing his text, and they comforted him because when he and Jamie said such words together, there was nothing else in the world, neither grandmother, nor uncles nor aunts, nor father nor mother, nor cats having kittens to be drowned in a bucket outside the kitchen door : just a robin and a bosom—and great delight and deliverance, so that it really did not matter where you were or what was happening to you, or whether you were a child or an old man—or anything but an angry woman, the only kind of being that is excluded from that paradise : not that being angry mattered, only you must not be mean in your anger. And, after all, the room in which all this peevish conversation was going on was dedicated to William Blake and Robert Burns

and James Lawrie and Stephen Lawrie, for whom the tempestuous confusion in which the others lived did not exist. . . There was more of it than the robin and the bosom :

Merry, merry sparrow
Under leaves so green
A happy blossom
Sees you swift as arrow
Seek your cradle narrow
Near my Bosom.

Pretty, pretty Robin
Under leaves so green
A happy Blossom
Hears you sobbing, sobbing
Pretty, pretty Robin
Near my Bosom.

With his cheek pillowed on a sugary bun, Stephen went to sleep and only awoke to find himself being packed into his overcoat with a rough woollen muffler being wound round his neck, Tibby caressing his face as she did so with her rough arthritic hands, pressing her wrinkled cheek to his and saying :

“Don’t cry, boy, don’t cry. You’ll come again soon. You’ll come again soon.”

Stephen was too confused and too sleepy to make any reply, and did not wake up until he found himself in the train with Annette and Bennett and some coarse, thickly-speaking people and a very pretty little girl with a purple balloon which made her all the prettier, because she never took her eyes off it and looked up at it with a steadfast ecstatic expression.

Annette said :

“If you would only do what you want to do and tell her afterwards. But you go and tell her and she breaks you. She has no feeling and no imagination.”

Bennett replied testily :

“Wait until we get home.”

“But it always happens like this.”

Bennett said :

" If you hadn't insisted on moving last quarter I might have had some money to spare and I shouldn't have been so tired."

" If I didn't make you move you would be just like them. You would sit still in a stuffy house and make yourself feel important by making everyone else miserable."

" Better that than being a shiftless Folyat."

" Fosdick, you mean."

" It's Fosdick in *Cudjo's Cave*, but it's Folyat in real life."

Stephen was not interested in the conversation. That queer word Fosdick had been familiar to him as long as he could remember, and had no very dreadful significance. He was overcome now with an alarmed feeling that this was not the way home, that there had been a change and that he was definitely out of it, as disgraced and disgraceful as his grandfather.

It was dark when they left the train, and, after what seemed to him an interminable walk past a sweet-shop and a public-house and a church and a row of posts, which he knew meant that awful prosperous thing, a Private Road, they came to a house that he did not know, an oddly-shaped new brick house shaped to fit the corner made by the private road and a lane full of back doors. They went in by the back door, and there were Mordaunt and Audrey and the baby (not the *new* baby) grown into a large, speechless, squatting thing, and the big clock and his father's hats and overcoats, and the book-case and the piano. There was also an evil-looking woman with a withered hand who looked at him crossly as though she had made up her mind at once to be his enemy for no reason except her own private satisfaction.

" So *that's* 'is Granny's boy, is it ? " sniffed the woman.
" Huh ! "

Stephen straddled his legs and put down his head as he had seen his grandfather do when he had to face a blast of hostility, and he echoed her :

“ Huh ! ”

The woman sniffed again and said :

“ Looks unhealthy ! ”

Mordaunt looked Stephen up and down from the height of his superior inches, and said :

“ Can you fight ? ”

Stephen looked blank. The question seemed to him meaningless and childish. Mordaunt looked contempt and then condescended to say :

“ Bill Bentley’s got a goat. If it has a kid I’m going to have it.”

“ It’s a billy goat,” laughed Annette.

“ Well, it’s going to have a wife,” replied Mordaunt, who could never allow himself to be in the wrong. “ And I’m going to have the kid because I licked all the Wesleyans what Bill Bentley couldn’t, and they don’t come down our lane any more. We kick Wesleyans at our school, Wesleyans and Germans.”

“ Have your supper, you boys, and go to bed,” growled Bennett, who could not endure his eldest-born’s torrential chatter.

As a matter of form, when they reached their attic, Mordaunt challenged Stephen to a pillow fight ; knocked him down, trod on his face, and finally made him serve as a ladder by which he climbed into bed, grinding into the exile’s back with his knees and fists as he did so.

CHAPTER V

EXILE

THE basis of the misunderstanding between Stephen and his family lay in the fact that when he was at home he was in exile, and when he was in exile in the stucco house he was at home. He had learned to live like an old man, and also he had learned the deep secret of the poet and the rebel,—to defy the world to devise a punishment which he could not enjoy. How are you going to disgrace those in whom grace is the well-spring of their being and who will die rather than substitute for it prosperity or respectability or frequent notice in the public press? You may try to punish a lonely child by saying that he shall not go to a party, but he asks nothing better than to be out of it, for no festivity can possibly equal his imagination of what a festivity should be. Stephen was most tortured by his elders when they went out of their way to please him. They revealed then their unpardonable insensibility, which he was quite willing to pardon, though never again, when it was disclosed in all its shattering immobility, would he trust himself to it.

Upon one occasion, when Mordaunt also was staying at the stucco house with him—(a blustering intruder who pretended to Uncle Robin that he would like to be a sailor, while he told Uncle Mark that he wanted to be a clergyman)—it was announced awfully that Aunt Phoebe was going to take them to a Christmas Party at the Gibson

Murrays', and Mordaunt got into trouble for referring to the family as Murrays, and Catherine said :

"Annette is so careless. She lets them play in the street with the common children. You must say *the* Murrays."

Mordaunt said he didn't care, and that if he had to be stuck-up he didn't want to go to any old party. Stephen had dreams of Christmas trees and candles and flaming Christmas puddings and little girls with long black thin legs and golden curls and bright faces that dazzled him so that he could not see them. He had seen Cinderella in the pantomime, and from that moment all his life he never ceased to be elatedly in love. He also saw a comic page, whose antics he mimicked exactly, until even Catherine laughed tears down her bulging cheeks. This buffoonery was a great resource against the insensibility of the elders, and he resorted to it when Aunt Phoebe perpetrated her cardinal offence.

Mordaunt had a suit of Etons passed on to him from a distant cousin. Stephen, responsibility for whose clothes was forgotten in both his houses, had nothing. He was the fit ragamuffin companion for his grandfather, but Aunt Phoebe had bragged to the Gibson Murrays about his beautiful eyes and his angelic nature. For all their money, the Gibson Murrays were common people, and in Scotland would have been immeasurably beneath the Lawries, of the manse, no less, and married on the Laird's daughter. She had made Stephen something of a marvel to the Murray children, and she had to produce him, and to produce him she had to dress him, for Bennett had no money and Catherine refused to produce a penny. (Annette must learn to economise.)

Stephen had no clear idea on the subject. Few things were more hateful to him than being taken to the big shop full of mirrors and being made to look as though he were someone else than the person referred to when a very ridiculous voice said :

“ I want a suit for this boy.”

Now, either Aunt Phoebe was short of money, or she had ridiculous ideas of her nephew's beauty, or she was a mean and haggling shopper, or she did not ask for what she wanted but ransacked the shop and composed his costume piece-meal. She did not purchase a suit of becoming manly modesty ; but, stripping her victim, she put him into striped stockings, a pair of very short and very tight knickers and a white serge sailor blouse, with a red silk sailor scarf, and a white and gold sailor collar. What sailor ever wore such things ? That was what Stephen wanted to know but dared not ask. The monstrosities were bought. It pleased Aunt Phoebe to buy them, but Stephen had to wear them, and wear them he did at the Gibson Murrays in a condition of such shame that he spent the evening in hiding behind a curtain near the refreshment table by the ice-cream wafers, so that there were none left by the time the other children came in from the magic-lantern. In terror he sank to the floor, and was discovered asleep when it was time to go. He was never confronted with his guilt, and Aunt Phoebe got into trouble for her extravagance in purchasing white serge which, after the one wearing, was a dirty grey.

It was Aunt Phoebe, after staying with the almighty John Lawrie, who told Uncle Robin, who told Tibby who told Annette that Aunt Maggie, who wore a wig, would be certain to leave some of her money to Bennett because he went to church. The reason seemed odd and inadequate for doing anything so important as leaving money. Stephen gathered that it was tremendously important, because it was more talked of than anything else. Aunt Phoebe and Catherine, when they were not quarrelling, were always talking about wills and how soon people were going to die. It was not only their own relatives either, but the relatives of their relatives and those of the people next door, and Annette's. That was

what money was for. You left it or had it left to you and then you saved it and invested it and were disgusted with the Government, and people who lived by and thought of other things were wicked. So Stephen gathered, he did not know how, for he never listened to conversation, but phrases and fragments fell on his ears and pieced themselves together into some kind of grotesque and remote meaning, according to which his grandfather was the wickedest man who ever lived, though there were other wicked people who were always making up to someone for his or her money. Stephen did not care whether his grandfather was wicked or not: he only knew that Jamie, the magnificent hairy old man with his cut-water of a nose and his vehement passionate movements, was the only person in the world who never hurt him. Why, even to see James Lawrie take his boots off was a thrilling and dramatic revelation, so superb was his absorption in what he was doing. He would thrust out a leg, grip the laces fiercely, flick them out of their holes, swing off a boot, and so with the other leg, and then pour himself, the whole of himself, into the comfort of his slippers with an "A-a-h!" that came right up from the pit of his stomach and made Stephen smile all over and want to laugh with delight. It was so with everything that James Lawrie did, and if this be exile what is there to be said for home?

The burly, handsome old man in his shabby green frock coat, sprigged waistcoat and rag-bag trousers, never talked of money. He once told Stephen that he had finished with it long ago, because he and money hated each other so deeply that they had parted without a quarrel, not understanding each other even enough to do that: and he added with a chuckle:

"I leave it to the Jews and my brothers."

The room in which he was allowed to live was the dining-room, a big light apartment with a French window

looking on to an unkempt shrubbery ending in the blank wall of the end house of a row of cottages. It was occasionally occupied by Tibby, hanging out the clothes, but for the most part its dinginess was left to cats and sparrows. The room itself was hardly more cheerful. The dining-table, dedicated to those whom Stephen thought of as "the others" was enormous and aldermanic, and the mahogany and horsehair chairs clung to it like the parasites of a rich man, and as though, like parasites, they dreaded the poverty of the rest, the battered side-board, the bursting armchair that pricked you with its stuffing when you sat on it, the crumpled fender, and the big ormolu clock in its glass cover and its two pendants on either side of the mantel-piece. The pictures were awful too: there were David slaying Goliath, and Jesus Christ before Pilate, and a head whose eyes followed you wherever you stood in the room, and Stephen, to escape from it, used to turn to the blackened little portrait of the Rev. T. Lawrie on one side of the fireplace, or to his wife Margaret who, with her large, firm, decent face, hung on the other. They were fine people, those two, more living to Stephen than if he had known them in the flesh, tenderness and force, side by side, for ever somehow, for ever one.

Nobody ever talked about them. The others never looked at them and Jamie was always busy with his friends William Shakespeare and William Blake, and Robert Burns and Edmund Spenser, or thinking, or talking or writing about actors and singers (like Sims Reeves who soared so high on his voice that you could not believe he could ever come down again) and speakers and preachers, all kinds of people who in his phrase, did something to you. He was always writing and read everything to Stephen, paragraph by paragraph, except when he wrote about cotton, when he would always go cold with rage, drink a lot of coffee, and stamp and

swear and call Tibby in to read through the damned thing. He wrote about cotton once a week and Stephen had to sit very still (he was good at that), until the writing and the coffee were finished and then Jamie would turn to the child and say :

“What the Hell is the good of cotton ? It only makes you a little richer and the niggers who grow it, and the Indians who wear it a little poorer.”

Stephen knew these words by heart and used to say them under his breath as Jamie roared them and was then ready to go on with “Green grow the rushes, Oh !” or “Bonny Wee Thing,” or “The Little Boy Lost,” which ever was called for. But sometimes Jamie would not be there on the cotton day and then Tibby, with her head nid-nodding and her sad eyes sinking deeper than ever into her face, would take out of the pipe-drawer a dirty little note-book and write, puzzled and anxious, hoping to gracious that she were not making any awful mistakes.

It was a sad business and it was a poor empty house when, as sometimes happened, Jamie would disappear for two or three days and then, as like as not, break a window or two when he came back, or, as he did once, kick his way through the front door. Then the others were very excited and used to arm themselves with pokers and sticks and Catherine used to say :

“Oh ! God help me, the man’s mad ! The man’s mad !”

What were they afraid of ? Stephen could never understand, for Jamie never hurt anybody. He broke things because he hated them and wanted them to move or perish, or get out of the way somehow. “Dead things, dead people”—those were words he used often to mutter when he was in one of his black moods and could not read his friends, or talk about the marvellous men and women who filled the world with adoration.

It was ridiculous how afraid the others were, standing with their sticks and their pokers and their long scared faces confronting the old man, who looked enormous, bigger even than Christopher North in Miss Lawrie's engraving, with his head hanging, and his nose jutting, and the lovely crisp hair of him hanging and bristling about his ears, while his eyes flamed and glared and his lips opened and closed, with his tongue every now and then flicking out as though he despised words and his antagonists too much to be able to say anything, only forcing them to feel something that they hated to feel.

And they would do such stupid things too. Sometimes when he was like that, towering and commanding and terrible, they would lock him in the dining-room or his bedroom, and then he would burst down the door or wrench the window out of its frame and throw it down into the street, and drop down after it himself, and lie or sit there, utterly exhausted, dry-eyed, haggard, stiff and cold with indifference. . .

At other times he would walk straight through them where they stood and it was as though he were surrounded with an invisible power that paralysed and numbed them, and never in his life did Stephen see anything so ridiculous as Catherine's face on one occasion when he did that. Her whole countenance seemed to wilt and droop and to drag her eyes down and sideways, to make them even more expressionless than they were in ordinary wear, and they never looked the same to him again. Nor indeed was she ever the same to him, for, after Jamie had walked through them, he swooped down on Stephen, gathered him up in his arms, flew to their lair in the dining-room and held him tighter, tighter and tighter until something in his own breast snapped, and then he wept and wept and wept, his beard pressed into the boy's face and neck, weeping, weeping, weeping all the furiousness out of his embrace until there were only

tenderness and sweetness and peace between the two of them, in them, through them, filling all that place and every place.

“Pretty, pretty Robin
Near my bosom.”

It was the deep ease of that moment, the sweet, simple, thrilling peace of it that made Stephen all his life unable to accept anything less or to endure anything, however pleasant in seeming, that led away from it. It seemed to him then and after, that a spirit greater than either of them, greater too than the love between them, took possession of them, and made him see, unintelligibly at first, and for many, many years, the little in the world that was serious and the much that was superbly funny. Catherine, for instance, became from that moment so funny, that the mere thought of her could make him cry with misery, while her presence made him ache because it was so awful, so appalling that a small boy should want to laugh at the deliberate pathos of an old woman. Old woman ! If she had only been either old or a woman : but she was majestic, enthroned, insisting so meticulously upon the obstinacy, the brittle, meticulous obstinacy which she paraded as her will. Victoria Victrix ! She insisted on being a widow when her husband, her lord and her master, her kindest, gentlest lover was alive. So did they all, all these women of a world ransacked to keep them fat and peevish and idle and devout in their self-worship.

And from that moment Stephen and James Lawrie were more than ever definitely in exile and happy in it, asking no more and no better, though the boy was thereafter subjected to the strain of his inability to explain that he *did not* desire the kindness or the pathetic fumbling love that were expended upon him since he was not allowed to share it with his companion, the old man, whose wickedness was the mainstay and the central

interest of the existence of the others. They hated him for it and for his deep remorseless knowledge of themselves, not knowing the love with which he was filled, a love that could only go out to the reality—however hideous—of those with whom, in however small a degree, his life was bound up. His love could not endure hypocrisy or vanity or self-deception and it flamed white hot in its impotence to destroy the shame in which the others dwelt in that house. All they knew of what was between the old man and the boy was that when they were together life was somehow sweeter and easier, and they imagined that the reprobate was kept away by these means from his disastrous and disreputable cronies.

On the contrary, Stephen met them all and was taken to the old man's haunts, Hepworth's, the bookshop, the Arts Club, the theatre, and to Miss Meekin's. Wherever Jamie went there was a kindling and an excitement; an ardour of discussion, roars of laughter at his sallies.

Miss Meekin was a figure of great importance in Stephen's mind, as important, though she had very little to do with the events of his life, as Miss Lawrie. She was, in effigy, the world outside the family, the coarse, rough, jovial, careless world, unconcerned with gentility or conscience or morals or the agued self-respect which kept all the Lawries in a morose, semi-retirement all their days, so that they never lived and never loved and dreaded life and love. . . . Miss Meekin made Stephen feel that the world approved of the exiles, smiled upon them, laughed at and with them, and was, and always would be kind to them. The world, the human world of Miss Meekin, was so much more important than the stucco house, or Miss Lawrie's house, or the House of Parliament or any other of the institutions which it endures in its prolific generosity.

She was very large, very vulgar, loud-voiced, with a laugh that ought to have shattered the windows but

instead played havoc with your nerves. She kept a little tobacconist's shop at the corner of a street opposite a Board School that was full of dusky Jewish children, and she had the most interesting friends. It was even said that she had once lived next door to Charles Peace. Her brother had been in prison and when he was not lying asleep on the sofa in the parlour he served in the shop, and would sometimes tell how they hanged people in the gaol. Jamie would sometimes sit in the shop all day, watching the customers come and go, and sometimes, in the evening, there would be a party in the parlour with cards and stout. All kinds of men came then and they talked freely of horses and women and fighting-men, and Miss Meekin laughed and laughed until her mountain of golden hair slid to one side, and she would begin to sweat and to wipe her mouth with the back of her hand. But she never forgot Stephen's presence and was always kind to him with a grotesquely exaggerated politeness. When in his enthusiasm he talked about her to Tibby she said :

“S—sh !”

And she would shake her head sadly until he began to understand that Miss Meekin was even worse, if possible, than Jamie and himself. No one else, of course, identified him, as she did, with Jamie. As far as the others were concerned he did as he was told and did it with so gentle a grace that they never suspected his detachment, and, to counteract the evil influence to which their necessity exposed him, set about his education.

Catherine taught him about Jesus and the Virgin Mary, and Mr. Collier, the Rector of St. Saviour's, and Mr. Leet, the organist, especially the organist. She gave him to understand that there was no other church than St. Saviour's for Salvation, and that Uncle Mark's church was a place of futile social parade, where there was nothing but the spectacle of Uncle Mark singing in the

choir and holding out the big brass plate for the money-bags, a splendid sight but an ungodly. As for God, he was entirely occupied with Queen Victoria in her widowhood and with Catherine Lawrie in her afflictions, though, if He were asked every night, He might find time to make Stephen a good boy, but Stephen thought God must be so busy that he hardly liked to ask Him. . . . He also learned that the world had not been the same since Charles Dickens died, and gathered, a little indistinctly, that the world, having produced the Woods and the Lawries, it might as well perish. There was General Gordon also, murdered by Mr. Gladstone, and Catherine one day put on her jingling bonnet and clattering cape, all shiny with its jet beads, and took him to see a stained glass window of General Gordon laying his hands on a little black boy.

Stephen said :

“ I am black, but Oh ! my soul is white.”

“ Rubbish,” snapped Catherine. “ Niggers don’t go to heaven.”

On that day also she showed him where the best shrimps in town were to be bought, and the grand school where his father had been, though there was no hope of his going there, as his father had chosen to make as great a mess of things as *his* father.

It was rather awful to be out with Catherine. She was so grand and so defiant, so regal, and it really did look as though the whole of Thrigsby lived and moved at her bidding.

Aunt Phoebe’s instructions made less impression on him. She taught him French, which he learned without interest because he knew that she was not the least interested either. So far as he knew she was only interested in oranges and in warming her legs by the fire, for she used to draw a very low chair up to the fender and sit with her toes almost under the grate, eating oranges

with a lump of sugar pushed through the peel. When she was not doing that she was writing letters, and when she wrote to his father she used to make Stephen write too, dictating a few stiff sentences : " I have been very good and am most happy with my kind Aunt who is teaching me French, so that I shall not be ignorant. She is going to buy me a pair of new boots." Aunt Phoebe was a big woman with a very little waist, and sometimes, as she sat beside him correcting his exercises she used to gurgle like a bottle. This noise was much more interesting to him than anything she taught him, though his lessons were intermittent, for she was always going away and coming back very grand and talking about money, until there was a quarrel with Catherine and Uncle Mark, and then she would relapse into eating more oranges.

CHAPTER VI

UNCLE ROBIN

THERE was a sea-captain with whom Stephen was once sent to stay, in the Isle of Man. Somehow, when someone had to be out of the way, it was always Stephen who was sent, because it was generally agreed that he was no trouble to anyone. He made the crossing from Liverpool alone and found the sea very cold, and wet and disagreeable. He was brought back by the sea-captain, who showed him the marvels of Liverpool and took him over a big ship that was built for the voyage to America, of which Stephen knew something, for Jamie had been there and had told him that you could sleep and eat and wash on the train, with niggers to help you. . . . This journey resulted in an alliance with Uncle Robin of whom, until then, Stephen had known very little except that he sat in a deck chair every evening and read *Whitaker's Almanac*, or *The Illustrated London News* or *Punch*, holding whatever it was, close to his nose because he had fallen when he was a boy, and his two eyes had been knocked into his nose. Returning from the Isle of Man, Stephen found that Uncle Robin did not live in the stucco house at all, but on the sea. He was not one of your "yo-ho-ho" theatrical salts but a professional scientific mariner with chart, sextant and compass, and a familiar knowledge of the stars.

He had a fleet of ships which, in the spring, sailed from his bedroom in full rig with white sails and flying

the Blue Peter. There were a brig and a brigantine, and a schooner, and a cutter, and a yacht. The two last stayed in home waters but the other three, the beauties, went on long voyages which were charted every day, and a log was kept for each. They were voyages of adventure and they picked up pleasant cargoes, as spices and coffee and silk, and took them to unlikely places like Bangkok and Madagascar. Never by any chance did they go to America or India, two places of which, like everyone else in Thrigsby, Uncle Robin was heartily sick. There would be disasters, mutinies, shipwrecks, marooned captains, encounters with smugglers and knaves of all kinds, and lyrical descriptions of storms and of days in calm seas with the furious sun beating down upon the glassy waters, fights between sharks and swordfish, captures of great whales and octopus. Every spring, when the bright little green buds peeped on the dirty bushes in the garden, the ships would be decked out in their sails and worked on every evening, after the shambling bearded man came home from his work, until the autumn, when he disappeared and went to Paris, taking with him a yachting cap and his binoculars for the crossing, and a sword-stick in case he should be attacked by the French, or—who knows—drawn into a duel. Indeed, who knows? Did he not return from Paris once in a state of great excitement because he had had an adventure. He was sitting quite quietly, really very quietly, in a café when suddenly a man came up to him, knocked his hat off and accused him of insulting his wife. Uncle Robin did not know enough French to be able to reply and his accuser, taking his silence for consent, spat in his face and went away. What are you to do in such a country among such people, amongst whom the quietest man is not safe? Yes, indeed, it is a good thing we have the Navy.

As to that Stephen had no opinion. He only over-

heard the story as Uncle Mark unpacked the presents, gloves and scent and a picture or two that he had brought from Paris. The precious ships' tackle he had bought in London was never unpacked in public ; there would be new spars, anchors, guns, windlasses, a figurehead maybe or a shining brass binnacle. He showed all these treasures to Stephen, after he had been to the Isle of Man, together with his stores in the sailor's chest he kept under his bed, which he had built himself in the corner like a bunk.

One day he said wistfully :

" I suppose you wouldn't like to be a sailor ? "

Stephen answered : " No."

Uncle Robin looked at him and said :

" No. I suppose you wouldn't, but your Uncle Serge was a sailor. It is a hard life, but it is the only life."

" Uncle Serge is an artist. He paints wars," replied Stephen who knew all about Uncle Serge from Annette, whose hero he was.

" I don't suppose he knows half as much about the sea as I do," said Uncle Robin. " Indeed, I don't suppose many men know as much about it."

He tried to make Stephen learn the flags of all the nations and of all the lines with their funnel-markings, but Stephen was a duffer at it and as for learning the signal flags he was hopeless. For all that those ships were to Uncle Robin, they were only toys to his nephew, and though the whole vast ocean was confined within his bedroom, for the boy there was neither salt nor foam, nor wind, neither landfall nor port in sight, but only bare boards beneath which lived eternally his magic, the dreams that live and love, in words penetrating and flooding life with their beauty.

Uncle Robin gave it up after a bit. He did not really want a companion, but he was very kind to Stephen after that, hovered round him in his shy way and every now

and then gave him pennies and threepenny bits, and even sometimes came into the dining-room when he and Jamie were together, and stood nervously by the fireplace with his legs astraddle, saying, "Hum—ha!" and "yes, yes," until at last he almost ceased to be one of the others, although he persisted in being too dignified to be human.

He brought the sea into the fantasy of the exiles, the sea and ships and merchandise, and he used to look hungrily at Stephen as though he wished he were a boy again, and could find a way of avoiding the disaster that had happened to him so that he could hardly see, and had become so shy that he could not help running as far away as possible from everybody, and would never stay in any one's house, not even Miss Lawrie's, but kept to his work year in, year out and spent the little money he allowed himself in going down to the sea at every opportunity and, in his holidays, darting over to Paris, if only to cross the sea and escape, as every Englishman must, from England. . . .

But there was more working in him than that. He used to watch the two together, the grey head and the brown, over their dominoes and their book, suspiciously, jealously, as though he were there to protect the boy from the old man's wildness that, whenever it moved, kindled the spirit until it flamed forth in disaster. Between the old man and Uncle Robin there was a watchful jealousy. They were like two dogs in the same street that have had a tussle but have never fought it out, knowing both of them that, if it came to that, it would be desperate. Though invited he would never join their games, but just stood by the fireplace watching, thinking, looking hungry.

Stephen, on his side, was a little shy of him because he always wore a tail-coat and because in the street he walked with a demoniac swiftness, noting nothing, going from point to point, as though he loathed the life of the

streets, which Stephen loved, no matter how shabby or dingy or squalid. The pressure of the tragedy, or the deadlock, or the pure cussedness, or whatever it was that intensified every state of being in the stucco house, made the one generation captive while it released the next; Jamie, of course, living, and roving, and soaring free as an eagle, rejecting his own generation, fighting the next and hovering now, gloating over the young, who could see clearly where he could only grope, and live in the senses what he had been able to wrest from the spirit that is indifferent, and lets us be what we will be.

This jealousy of Uncle Robin's found curious expression in his almost fawning upon the boy and allowing him privileges which were accorded to no other members of the household. For instance, Uncle Robin subscribed for *Punch* and *The Illustrated London News*, and it would drive him into a fury if anyone, even Catherine, touched them before he had seen them, and every one gasped when Stephen was allowed to read them without a word being said. But it was even more astonishing when he asked Stephen to bring his slippers and his chair in the evening, for it was one of his nervous foibles that he could not bear to be waited on, but, like a true mariner, must do everything for himself. And again the household was shocked when he called Stephen the Ship's Boy, for his passion for the sea had been so sacred that it was never alluded to, either by himself or by anyone else.

He was the most exactly and the most uselessly informed of men, a historian for whom history was a matter of facts and events, and he could tell you off-hand the name and constituency of every member of the House of Commons and the name of the head of every college at every University in the British Isles. Mercifully, he was too shy to parade his knowledge, but if anybody wanted to know anything he was very rarely found at a loss. His cousins, John's boys, had been to Oxford, and

he had photographs of their colleges, Lincoln and Corpus, in his dark sanctum at the foot of the stairs, together with pictures of Cambridge because George Lawrie was there, earning fame in archaeology. Poor Robin! He tried so desperately to be loyal to the life that God had given him, the straight way of duty to his mother, but he bristled with ideals and dreams, and it was hard work to subdue them to his position as a Thrigsbeian householder so as to convince his mother that his passion for the sea was a harmless hobby.

Catherine rather dreaded him and in the evening she fidgeted when she was alone with him, walked up and down, ravelled and unravelled her wool, caressed, repulsed, caressed again the cat on her lap and was never still until Uncle Mark came in smoking his pipe, bringing the day's news, the prices of shares, the arrest of a swindler or the latest story of Lord Salisbury. Uncle Mark would say :

"I don't like the look of things in India. We want another Clive."

"Yes, Mark," Catherine would say.

"That man Gladstone ought to be hung, drawn and quartered. We should have had the world at our feet but for his sanctimonious meddling. I hate a hypocrite. Shall it be cribbage or piquet?"

Uncle Robin would fidget in his chair. Their talk irritated him and interfered with his reading.

After the specified number of hands, Uncle Mark would look at the clock and say that he was due at the Club, and there would be a grim silence in which Catherine would look desperate and seem to be making an effort to swallow down the words that rose to her lips. Uncle Mark would look very stiff and stern and then go out abruptly, and Uncle Robin would give a great gasp of relief and throw out his long thin legs, and bury his nose even more deeply in his book. Catherine would look

across at Stephen, where he sat uncomfortably on the sofa, as though she had just remembered him, and say :

“ Good gracious me ! You white-faced little thing. You ought to have been in bed hours ago.”

Somehow she always did forget him in the evenings, when she and her sons were together. It was as though he was necessary to them, to help them to bear the weight of the closing of another day. When Aunt Phoebe was there, he was always put to bed not later than seven, but when she was away he had to wait until he was remembered or no longer needed.

One night, after Uncle Mark had gone to the Club, the silence was longer than usual and Stephen saw that he had been completely forgotten. The lights and shadows in the room seemed to swing to and fro in the tension that ensued, and was maintained interminably. Uncle Robin's deck-chair began to creak, and Stephen saw that he was trembling. At last he let his book slide down to the floor and he got up and stood with his back to the fire, just as he did sometimes in the dining-room and, spluttering and stammering more than usual, he at last managed to say faintly :

“ Mamma, I have something very serious to say to you. . . . Mamma, I am a man. . . . Mamma, I propose to get married.”

Catherine set up a howl like that of a cow separated from a sick calf. Her hands beat helplessly in the air, she gasped, and gobbled, went pallid over the whole expanse of her pink face, made a ferocious effort and said :

“ Don't talk nonsense.”

“ It is not nonsense.”

“ I say it is nonsense, with my example and your brother's example before you. . . . Oh ! my God, with Bennett, Bennett, Bennett before you. . . .”

“ It would not affect you in any way, Mamma. I should. . . .”

"The sickening anxiety of Bennett is almost more than I can bear, and where, where, where in the world is the woman who would put up with your ships, and your books and your yachting, except myself? Where is she?"

Robin smiled a little fatuously into his beard and said:

"Her father is one of our clients."

"A common woman, a common Thrigsby woman. You can put that nonsense out of your head. I won't have any more grandchildren to keep. . . Oh! dreadful, dreadful. What have I done that I should be punished with such a husband and with sons who want to leave me? . . ."

Uncle Robin pulled at his beard.

"No one wants to leave you, Mamma. But I am a man."

Had he said he was a fish, she could not have been more shocked and astonished. Her head went back and she gaped at him, looked him up and down, up and down until he felt, poor wretch, the wretch that he was, and what a mockery of a man to be talking of marriage. He muttered miserably:

"I feel young sometimes."

"Stephen! Go to bed!"

Stephen bolted as though propelled from a catapult. The way in which Uncle Robin, a grown man, had wilted away was very dreadful to him, and he was haunted, then and always, by the memory of Catherine with her head thrown back and her eyes goggling like a crab's, and her hands like claws reaching out to rend what was left of the poor man in pieces. And then: "No more grandchildren to keep!" There was something awful and ominous about that. Charity! Stephen had read a book in which there was a charity boy called Noah Claypole, and another boy who had to sleep under the counter. A charity! People were always cruel to a charity, and the stigma of it stayed through life. Rather than be a charity he would run away.

He did run away, but not being that kind of boy (if there is such a kind of boy) he made a hash of it and only got as far as Miss Meekin's, where he looked in, hoping to say good-bye to Jamie and to ask him if it was far to Liverpool or America, and if they minded charities there. There was no sentimentality or self-pity about it, and very little emotion. Stephen's emotions came in blasts and storms, electric and clarifying. It was a matter of a word, the revolting word, Charity. . . . There was no one in Miss Meekin's shop and he began to regret his precipitancy. However, having begun to run away, he thought he had better go on with it and he penetrated to the parlour where, lying on the rag rug, looking like a bundle of rags, green coat, grey hairs and beard, all huddled together, he found his grandfather "plang," as the others called it. He touched the old man's face and it was very wet and cold, his hand and that was worse. He called out, but no one heard him. A customer came into the shop and handed in a piece of paper with the name of a horse on it. Stephen knew where to put it; in the drawer in the escritoire. The grey and green bundle of rags moved a little and Stephen ceased to think or to feel anything at all. There was nothing to do but to wait. Jamie could not run away because he was grown-up, and so when a word hurt him more than he could bear, he threw himself away. It was worth while waiting, for, when he came back and took possession of himself again, Jamie was lovely and sweet, and tender and full of fun and great laughter. Those were the best times of all, when there was great glee in the games and the songs of the poets that they rollicked through together.

"To think of the little varmint finding him out there!" said Miss Meekin, mopping at her eyes, when she came back and found the tired child waiting for sense and manhood to return to the bundle of rags. "A chip of

the old block sure enough ! A handsome, gorgeous old terror he is to be sure, and the brat the very spit of him."

She gave Stephen milk and a bun, turned him into the shop, telling him to mind it and to call out if she were wanted, and then with expert skill, she fell to restoring the fallen ruin that had taken refuge with her disreputable goodness of heart.

"You poor, silly old man," she muttered as she ministered to him. "You poor, silly old man," but her every movement was an act of homage. "One of these days, you know, you'll kill yourself and then you'll be sorry. A fine gentleman like you !"

It was not long before Jamie was himself again, and most truly himself, talking with a brilliance and a clarity which his hearers did not understand, but with a dramatic force that compelled their spell-bound attention. Jamie delivered himself of an oration on the present and eternal discontents that would have pricked the wind-bag of Burke's rhetoric. He drew a picture of humanity climbing up an endless ladder leading out of nowhere into nowhere, so that nobody looked either to the right or the left, and each man saw nothing but the boots of the man above him, which, in desperate affection he licked, knowing also that if he did not do so, he would be kicked in the guts and thrown down. "The stifling dullness of it !" he cried, "the stifling dullness ! And the horror of the women hanging on to your legs, weeping and crying : 'Lick that good man's boots ! Lick that good man's boots or we are ruined.' I thank God that I was ruined years ago. When the ladder breaks—and it is cracking now—I shall be the only man left, the only man able to crawl away."

Miss Meekin laughed till the tears ran down her fat painted cheeks, and Stephen sat horror-stricken by the picture created in his mind of that awful ladder, going from nowhere into nowhere, until he took refuge in a

waking dream of a Heaven to which everybody was admitted by Uncle Mark, in a white surplice, holding a big brass plate, while the choir sang an anthem :

“ Oh, Mr. Gladstone, are you never going to die ?
One more chance for the Grand Old Man.”

This anthem was Stephen's first composition. He made it up on the occasion when, with Uncle Robin, he stood in a thin dismal crowd in the street and watched Mr. Gladstone drive by in a closed carriage, going from nowhere into nowhere, lost, like everybody else, because they looked neither to the right nor to the left. . . . Miss Meekin's laughter swept away his dream. It was so good, rich and real in its coarseness, that laughter ! You felt that Miss Meekin understood men and could take all their tortured pain into that enormous strong body of hers, and absorb it with the food of which she ate such immense quantities. When Jamie had had the harangue with which he invariably returned to his senses, she busied herself with food, and made him eat a porter-house steak and drink the best part of a quart jug of beer, and as he ate she exhorted him to remember, when he felt that way, to come to her, as it was no good his getting himself locked up, with his name in the papers, as he had the boy to think of, let alone that woman who was the cause of all the trouble.

“ Nothing to do with it,” chuckled Jamie, “ nothing to do with it. You women flatter yourselves. The depths of a man are not for you, and you know it.”

Miss Meekin laughed and laughed as though he had made the best joke yet. She had no need or use for theory, but took men and little boys as she found them.

Stephen sat with them at the table, looking from one to the other of these strange beings who made the little

parlour rock with their laughter, and suddenly they both began to beam upon him, and he said :

“ I’ve run away.”

At that they laughed more loudly than ever, and Miss Meekin said :

“ Bless the boy ! You’d think he was a husband already. Running away to old Meekin ! ”

“ Going back ? ” asked Jamie, who always addressed Stephen as though he were an equal or even slightly his superior.

“ Oh, yes,” replied Stephen cheerfully. “ Uncle Robin is going to give me a sword.”

“ Robin’s the moke, ain’t he ? ” asked Miss Meekin, and Jamie scowled at her.

“ Want to be a soldier then, Laddie ? ”

“ No,” said Stephen, “ but a sword is like a flame.”

He often said things like that—not in the least knowing what he meant—just as he often said that he or someone else was going to do something which, in the upshot, was almost invariably done.

“ Well, well,” said Jamie. “ I’ll take the blame of it—I’m used to it.”

That settled and agreed they were in no hurry to go, but stayed and helped Miss Meekin in the shop, and talked to the queer people who came into it, played Old Maid all the evening, stayed the night, and in the morning went back to the stucco house, blithe and gay, and, if anything, looking forward to the rumpus there was going to be.

As they turned in at the gate, Stephen, seeing Catherine’s angry face at the window and being struck by the contrast between her and his late hostess, asked Jamie :

“ Is Miss Meekin a relation of ours ? ”

Jamie said :

“ Miss Meekin is a bawd.”

“ What’s a bawd ? ”

“ A solvent,” replied Jamie.

CHAPTER VII

HOME

STEPHEN knew so little about the odd-shaped house at the corner of the private road in which his brother lived, that for a long time it existed for him only as a place in which there were radishes in the garden by day, and fire-works at night. This was because one night Bennett and Aunt Phoebe put out all the lights, and went into the garden, and filled the air with wheels and tails, and balls of gold and silver, and blue, and red, and green fire. It was meant to be exciting, but like so many deliberate pleasures it was not, and it only made the darkness darker, so that for a long time that house was most unjustly associated for Stephen with darkness, and with an appalling differentiation between the sexes, because someone out of nowhere stopped him in the private road, and explained to him that grown-up men and women did something to each other that made babies. Stephen did not in the least understand, but it made him cry, because there always were babies, and the thing that men and women did was so dark and secret. He did not believe it, but it was not long before he had to, because someone pointed out to him a boy who had done it—the awful thing. He did not look any different from any other boy, and this upset Stephen greatly, for a thing could not be so very awful if it made no great difference, and he was persuaded that it was awful, though it had, as yet, nothing to do with himself or with anyone connected

with him, certainly not with his father and mother, who, about this time, became figures of light in an ominous and oppressive world of storm, and rage, and horror.

Miss Lawrie often used to quote old John Greig as having said that Annette was a thoroughbred. The word had no meaning for Stephen, who was familiar with no animal larger than a goat, unless it were the elephant at the Zoo, but there was certainly something in Annette that baffled everybody, a reckless happiness, a careless and restless energy, an unquenchable ridiculous humour that moved mysteriously from disaster to disaster, to results that were somehow good. Nothing ever went right with her, and she said so cheerfully enough—nothing was ever in its place, nothing ever punctually done. Anything ridiculous could distract her, and as she could see the ridiculous in the tiniest detail, she always was distracted: and she was always so much engaged in helping with other people's children, or listening to other people's troubles, that she never had time for her own until suddenly, to her amazement, she would find Bennett in a frenzy. What about? The trouble would have grown so mysteriously that she would be unable to make head or tail of it, and she would say in her soft southern voice, that was so sweet among the rude Lancastrians: "Ain't I a fool woman? I don't know how you put up with me, indeed I don't. But there, you knew what a foolish creature I was when you married me, and if you didn't have me worrying you you'd have your mother."

Bennett would relapse into silence. Annette and life together clicked out situations as the machines at the warehouse clicked out the bales of cotton, and he could not keep count of them. They just piled up round him and there was no one to take them away, because nobody cared, and nobody knew how lost he was, with his love of ritual and patriarchal and priestly dignity in a world

which did nothing but pour out commodities by machinery and conveyed them by train and boat, to people who sometimes paid for them and sometimes did not. He loathed machinery. You could make no personal impression on a machine, so that it was no good being handsome and clever and full of all kinds of talents and passions. The Bank clicked out money, and the warehouses clicked out bales of cotton, and Annette clicked out children and situations, among others, the immovable and implacable quarrel with his mother that made him feel utterly hopeless. One said one thing, the other another, and both seemed to care more for their mutual hatred than for himself—and expenses increased and his income did not. The machines seemed to enrich everybody but himself. Perhaps he hated them too much, and somehow they knew it, and could not forgive him for being handsome and clever and terrifying like his father, and in love with Annette. . . . That seemed to be the unpardonable thing. For a whole year after they were married no one had come near them except Jamie, who, in his hungry way, pestered them with his adoration and made everybody think they were as disreputable as himself. And what a year they had had! The money that had seemed so much when they set out so airily had proved to be so little with food and clothes and furniture to buy—and illness, illness, illness. Ah, God! was ever there such helpless agony as during the first months when Annette was ill, and there was no one to turn to, no one, and he was too proud to go to either her people or his own, who went on with their silly lives as though no miracle had happened, and young love in Thrigsby were a crime, unmentionable, unthinkable, to be stamped down with all the other horrors of the place into the slums. Inhuman brutes, never to think, never to know that Annette, dear, dear, laughing, laughable Annette was ill and that there was no money, no money, no money,

and a month's salary taken in advance ! Pawnshops, half-crowns borrowed here and there—and love aching, love dying because it made no happiness, no impression on the bitter cold indifference of the grey and withered people in the black and choking streets. And the poor were so happy, the common people who had nothing, and *they* would help. A common woman helped, who worked all day to earn her bread, and then worked all night for them because Annette was ill.

The struggle with love was hard enough without the addition of illness, and the sickening days when there was no money in the house and he had to creep round to the sign of the Three Balls and pawn his overcoat to buy bread and milk. How suddenly the irresistible elation of love ceased ! How profoundly it had changed himself and Annette without making the slightest difference to the world, except that as a married man he was out of the fun and the adventurousness of his friends in town and at church ! Father Smale, his adored priest, said :

“ God, who gives us the will to act, will provide for what comes of it.”

So far it looked as though God had only provided the pawn-broker's shop, and the filthy woman who just made things possible by coming in at night. It was apparently a crime to love and to be young, while to have no money was a disease more loathsome than leprosy. After a month or two of it, Bennett began to expect people to shrink away from him, and he shrank away before they did—to be the first—and to keep his self-respect. It seemed so strange that he should have to choose between the world and Annette, because there was no choice.

He had to be with Annette. Every possible moment he had to be with her to miss no word that she said, no note of her laughter, no drop of the tenderness with which her presence surrounded him, no throb of the thrill that

gripped him when he touched her, his own, his gentle, his beloved little wife, who made all life melt into a dear foolishness completely satisfying, healing and strengthening, which stood firm whatever happened, however much she and he changed, and made nonsense of everything that was fixed and rigid.

And Annette changed. Almost in a night the young bloom went from her, and her serene eyes looked puzzled over what was happening to her, which she tried to explain to him by saying that she was growing all ways at once, up and down and sideways. And then, ill as she was, she alarmed him by gathering herself up into a little fiery ball of gay defiance, as though she knew she was in for a long fight and intended to enjoy it. It was as though some mysterious power had gently but irresistibly brushed Bennett aside to place in her two little hands something of its own benevolent force. When he was overwhelmed by difficulties she never even saw them, dealt with them as they confronted her, and quoted a saying of her mother's :

“When one door shuts another door opens.”

For Bennett too many doors were shut, the door of the stucco house, the door of the Folyat's house, the door of success and adventure. Only the door of the church was open, and he whisked through it and devoted himself to the study of ritual, with which gradually he filled all his goings out and his comings in, getting used gradually to spending a little more than he had, not looking ahead, because the prospect was too awful, and praying to God to let him be master in his own house, a good husband and a good father—and not, Oh ! a thousand times not, such a father as he had had.

There was a great deal of religion in his love for Annette. He worshipped her as he had secretly worshipped the Virgin Mary in his boyhood, and indeed, homely though she was, there was much of the Dutch Madonna in her

countenance, the high, clear forehead, the limpid steady grey eyes, from which there flowed so easily tears of merriment, and tears of tenderness, but never tears of grief, the fine little high-bridged nose and the wide, curious and pleasantly greedy mouth. He was, in fact, much more her priest than her husband, and curiously looked the other way and blinded himself when her children were born, hovered jealously while she was absorbed in them, and claimed her for his own again directly they could be left to look after themselves, so that Annette was a child with her children, a divinity to her husband, and never a woman at all, and was always filled with a naive astonishment at herself, and a little frightened by the wicked determination that possessed her to fight her way out of Thrigsby at all costs and to thwart the bitter resolution that possessed Catherine Lawrie, her mother-in-law, that the children and the children's children of James Lawrie should be of Thrigsby Thrigsbeian, poor at that, lost and forgotten.

Having divined Catherine's almost unconscious resolve that there should be no more Lawries, Annette often laughed aloud at her own fecundity and loved it. What, after all, was life without a baby? . . . There was no money! Very well then, there was no money. Millions of people were rubbing along without it, and what millions of others were doing she could do also,—if only Bennett were not so gnawed by his hankerings after the church, and respectability and rigidity, and his dread lest, if he were not rigid and respectable, and pious, and unadventurous, he would be cut out of the wills of his uncles and aunts, and cousins.

His brothers were saving and investing: his sister had already received two legacies, while Annette's father was cheerfully selling off his property to meet the deficits of his church, and to save his elder children from collapse.

Annette's father and mother were kind good people, but very silly and old fashioned and, in the few moments when he lapsed from his worship of her, Bennett saw that she was terribly like them, and her restlessness made him sick with alarm, though he never rebuked her for it and in the end always gave in to her wishes. He had to. For after Stephen was born, she was more than ever, more deeply, defiantly gay and possessed by a will, concealed under a fantastic irrelevance, before which his own crumbled miserably away.

He thought first of all, at that time, that she was going to love Stephen more than himself, and was morosely and desperately jealous until it appeared that she was absolutely and startlingly indifferent to the child, whose conception and birth had been an experience altogether too deep for her. He had been very still and heavy in the carrying, but also the cause of strange fits of exaltation of a terrible, overwhelming energy, and of extraordinary times when, lying on her bed, she would seem to rise, and grow, and break into torrents of a beauty and a force, that poured between her and the stars, ignoring the world of people and things, and flowers and birds and beasts altogether. The pains of his birth, too, were nothing like the pains of her first confinement, but an agony that broke into a sweetness, then came again, and broke again while her body was held in the embrace of an enormous, unimaginable strength, gentle, and kind and warm, and each time the rocking agony brought such a miraculous, such an intolerable sweetness that her heart, almost at the point of stopping, burst into flower, each flower into a song, that was at once the song of a bell and a bird, chiming, tinkling, chiming, tinkling, whistling like all the larks of all the Heavens that are beyond Heaven, and she was going to die, gladly, laughingly going to die, when the child moved, like an enormous fist thrusting through her womb, and suddenly jammed

so that she was torn asunder with pain so agonising that it was no longer a pain but a deliverance from everything, from everything : darkness, darkness, that made only the more blinding the light by which she was possessed. . . And the child, when she turned to it, was alive with that light : a strange child, with an enormous head and an old, old face, tortured into the likeness of James Lawrie, and then of Jesus on the cross, and it was then the face, puckered and formless, of a sleeping infant, with a brooding smile showing through its immobility.

Annette looked nervously round at the Doctor and the midwife, to see if they knew anything of this nonsense and the terrible and unintelligible thing that had happened to her, but they were professional and impervious. Her secret was safe.

The Doctor said :

“ I was afraid I was going to hurt his head. It was touch and go, but I’ve torn his ear a little, that is all. Don’t worry. He’ll soon grow to fit that head of his.”

Annette was not worrying. She sank into a delicious exhaustion, feeling unaccountably that the child was no affair of hers, and that she and Bennett would have a lovely time together, because if a thing like that could not separate them, nothing could.

She was often puzzled after that. Do what she would for him, she could never feel about Stephen as she did about the other children. He did not need her. She was convinced of that, and though he had every conceivable illness with an incredible violence, she was never the least anxious about him, while, if Mordaunt cut his finger, she worried herself sick. Stephen could be so terrifyingly still. He would have an illness that would have killed any other child : but he put up no resistance, it raged through him, and left him thinner and paler but

unmistakably the same and unintelligible. He was always beautifully out of the way, unless an attempt were made to make him do something that offended him, and then his will broke down even hers.

She learned to leave him alone and taught everyone else to do so too, so that he was often forgotten and insensibly came to be left out of the calculations of the family as a family. It was said of him that he would never live to be a man, and if he did, that he would never be able to earn a living, and, therefore, nobody was concerned with him, except Mordaunt, who every now and then remembered him, and lugged him irritably in his wake upon his restless unending adventures, partly because he was ashamed of having such a brother, and tried nobly every now and then to teach him how to be a boy. But Mordaunt's way was not Stephen's, who very rarely wanted anything, but, when he did, set about getting it without the slightest regard for time or place or persons. His idea of getting a thing was unusual and might be said to consist in falling in love with it, whatever it might be, a little girl, or a man, or a tree, or the moonlight streaming through the window, or a flame, or a woman's legs, or a sweet tune played by Annette, on the tinkling piano. If anything engaged his attention at all he could never let it go until he had absorbed it into himself, or rather, had allowed himself to be absorbed into it. Things and people that did not engage his attention made no impression on him, and he was often astonished to find that he had made an impression on someone without his own attention having been engaged for a moment, as, for instance, when he was very small, his Cousin Aggie went roaring through grandfather Folyat's house announcing that she did not want to be Mrs. Stephen when she grew up. It was the first he had heard of it, as it was also his first encounter with the clamour raised by the other sex over the business of

marriage. He was slapped for putting such ideas into the child's head and one of his aunts shook her head over him and said that Annette was producing a queer litter in her slum.

That word stuck in his imagination for years and gathered round itself many other remarks that were repeated to Annette and made her very angry and more than ever determined to win the battle in which she was engaged, although it never presented itself to her as a battle for Stephen, whom, like everybody else, she regarded as hopeless. She found herself in conflict both with the Lawries and with her own people, for while on the one hand she did not want the security of saving and investment for her children, no more could she have any truck either with vulgar ambition or with the rather snobbish gentility of her own relations, and what else in the whole length and breadth of the country was there? She was a little too much afraid of her own sensuality to be an out and out worshipper of Jesus of Nazareth, and by an adroit sleight of mind she substituted Charles I, the Martyr-Saint of England, and round his figure, to Bennett's chagrin and discomfiture, she gathered all the undisciplined energy of her imagination and created a myth, by and for which she lived, delighting for the rest in the small trivialities of her domestic existence as a relief from the strain she imposed on herself.

Her children were allowed to amuse themselves how and when and where they liked. Her business with them consisted almost entirely in telling them stories and singing them songs, in a little piping voice which they adored—"Lubin, he twiddled his finger and thumb"; and "There was a lady loved a swine, 'Honey,' said she, 'Pig, hog wilt thou be mine?' 'Hunk!' said he"; and "Peri-meri-dixi-darmani," and a cradle song, the tune of which she made up herself and used to play, with endless improvisations, when she felt despondent, and

thought she was never going to escape from among the grotesque northern people, and that Bennett, after all, was too like his mother, and would become just a quivering jelly of grievances, and would sit wobbling in front of a fire, feebly resenting a world insensible to his extraordinary piety, endurance and gifts.

She felt sometimes that James Lawrie understood what she was going through, but there was no one else, absolutely no one else. . . Bennett had fits of energy and enthusiasm. He would be an actor, then a journalist, then a painter—Serge could give him introductions in London—then an inventor, then a parson, though he believed ardently, under Father Smale, in the celibacy of the clergy. He would come to a decision on Saturday, brood over it on Sunday, with three visits to the church, see Catherine on Monday and return crushed and humbled, say no more about it, and quarrel with Annette for her extravagance, insist on her keeping accounts, and once more take to the habit she loathed, of leaving her in the morning with just enough money to carry her through the day.

Annette never played the piano so much or talked with such restless gaiety as when she was alone with Stephen, as happened sometimes when he was convalescent. Perhaps, she thought that he paid no heed to her and that, as his big vacant eyes never saw anything, so his ears could hear and his memory retain nothing. She had discovered very early that he never repeated anything, and, indeed, he did not pay much attention to what she said. He understood her very well and how, like himself, she suffered from being different and was even more helpless, just as she understood that when he sat with his hands on his knees with the tears streaming down his face, that it was not because he was unhappy, but because he felt like that and was so absorbed in it that, for the time being, he could do nothing else.

His life, indeed, was rather depressing. He was always reported as good, and was always being rewarded for it, so that his conscience pricked him, for he had not been concerned with the life of the family at all. He left it alone and it left him alone, so that he was never either for or against it, but things went a little too far when, having been sent with Mordaunt to Miss Morgan's school, Miss Morgan, a little sharp stringy woman, kissed him in front of the class (Oh, horror! she was so ugly!) and told him she was going to give him a special prize for being the best and most obedient boy among the infants.

To that school he would go no more, but lay flat on the floor, and, though Mordaunt kicked him black and blue, and though Annette nearly pulled his arms out of their sockets, he would not budge and, in fact, never did go to that school again. . . . Annette understood him. Somehow he did to everything and everyone he touched, what he had done to her when he was born.

That was a long spell at "home." He understood from what Bennett said that Catherine was ill, and that Uncle Robin had had leeches on his stomach: also that things were more "awful" than ever.

"It is Hell," said Bennett.

"The way they treat that poor man!" cried Annette.

"Poor man! Poor man! Look what he has done with his crazy notions: dragged us all down until we have not a chance, not a hope! And haven't we the brains to do anything in the world, if only he weren't in the way? Which ever way I turn in this accursed town, I know that people think of me as that bloody madman's son."

"Bennett! Your own father!"

"I wish he'd die, I do."

"He's the only one who came to see us in that awful first year, and gave us the few shillings he's allowed to have."

“ Oh, you women ! Let a man go utterly to the devil and you are all for him, against the rest of us who slave and slave, and deny ourselves.”

This conversation filled Stephen with a dreadful elation, an aching nostalgia for evil and the stucco house. There was nothing in this odd-shaped house by the private road. Mordaunt had gone to a school kept by a man, a very important and impressive and hard little man, with a beard, who *prepared* boys (ghastly trade !), and there Mordaunt was achieving prodigies : and all was well and bright and there were going to be great changes when Aunt Maggie died and left her money—“ Faugh ! ” Stephen often said that to himself during those days. It was a great exclamation with Jamie : “ Faugh ! ” or “ Fegs ! ” or, “ Hell, my eye ! ” Bennett was blithe and excited and covered the walls, and the mantelpieces and the windows, with paintings of birds and butterflies, and bulrushes. Annette did not believe in it at all, and Stephen was plunged into an insufferable gloom, but Mordaunt, as usual, was monarch of all he surveyed and was going to win a scholarship and be a Don, like Cousin George, and play cricket for the county—“ Faugh ! ” also “ Hell, my eye ! ”

It was in the odd house that Stephen first encountered Miss Lawrie. He could not, nor did he ever attempt to, put a date on it. Chronology never mattered to him. What the world had been before he was born, was much the same as what it would be after he was dead. Life consisted in the emergence of forms and shapes with which he was already familiar, and the furtive efforts made by almost everybody to suppress them were just a nuisance that made those thus engaged disgusting in their incredible excitement. . .

Miss Lawrie was different. Her wrinkled grey face was so kind as she produced her offerings of shortbread and Edinburgh rock, and socks and singlets she had

knitted, and flannel for the babies' binders. She was like a little old bent fairy in black that has gone on since there was a world at all, wishing it well, and never realising that it does not want to be wished on, or blessed or cursed, but just to go on making its own muddle in its own way. There was no excitement about Miss Lawrie. Such as she was when Stephen first saw her, she remained until she died in an extreme old age, to protract and enjoy the joke of keeping those who had dedicated their lives to waiting for her money—waiting, spending more than she could afford on assisting the subsequent generation to embark upon some more vigorous business.

Stephen sidled up to her, and as he always did with anybody new, listened to the works inside her and not at all to what she said. There was a certain tune that went on inside people, not unlike the tune that came up into the sycamore tree from the beck. When he could hear it he was spellbound, enslaved, prepared to achieve prodigies: when there was no sound of it he was riveted with horror, cold and impotent. Never had he heard this tune so sweetly as in this little old lady whose speech was burred with the Doric of the North, like a far echo from the vault of Heaven, of the grand music that rumbled and roared and crashed and leapt aloft in trills and piercing vibrant notes in the battered magnificence of James Lawrie. Never was anything more charming than the talk flying between Miss Lawrie and Annette, who snuggled down into herself, and subdued her untidy restlessness altogether, and amazed Stephen by emerging as a very fine lady, who could make tune for tune with Miss Lawrie, and talked as though she knew all about London and Berlin and Paris, and capped Miss Lawrie's literary allusions with quotations from Dickens and Thackeray.

"I am delighted with you, my dear, and you must let

me share your boys with you," said Miss Lawrie. "A husbandless body like myself goes rummaging the world for boys to make them into men. My boys are everywhere, in Parliament and in the Embassies, and at Oxford and Cambridge, Bishops and Masters of Colleges, but with me they are always boys. They write to me and they come to see and to laugh at my little house. . . ."

Annette began to get very excited and she sat staring at Miss Lawrie as though she were some new kind of angel not to be found in the Bible or Holy Pictures.

"We Lawries, we Scots," said Miss Lawrie, "have been too shy and suspicious of the English—for you are English, are you not?"

"My grandmother was Dutch," replied Annette. "The family built ships in Devonshire, but there is nothing left of all that now except their old feuds and the house they built themselves."

"A comfortable people, the Dutch," said Miss Lawrie, "and a capable."

"But I'm not a bit Dutch," answered Annette. "I'm a Folyat with a scatter-brain and a beast of a temper. My grandmother was a great beauty but with such a temper that she ruined the family. No one could come near her, and she was once toasted at all the Clubs. I don't know what became of her looks but her temper has come down and I shall ruin Bennett with it, I know I shall."

The quality of this conversation suddenly opened up the world for Stephen, upon whose imagination pictures crowded so rapidly that he could not maintain any coherence among them: but the close confinement in which he had lived was broken down. The little Scots fairy had touched his shoulder-blades and wings sprouted on which he went soaring, as boys, young and old, always do in contact with a woman who knows her business.

Presently, a carriage arrived, and in the carriage was another little old lady, a very pretty one, and she was Mrs. Thomas Lawrie, a name of awe, because Thomas Lawrie was a Poor Law Guardian and might, at any moment, clap you into the workhouse, which, as every one knows, is a thousand times worse than prison. The pretty little old lady would not come in and they all went out to say how-do-you-do to her—Annette and Mordaunt, Stephen, Audrey, Phoebe, and the Baby, the composite name of the family of which Stephen, by *force majeure*, had to allow himself to be considered a part, though he was less than ever so, now that he had been hobnobbing through Miss Lawrie's and his mother's talk, with Bishops and Diplomats and Authors.

So intent was he upon this new existence that had opened up before him, that he climbed into the carriage and sat down in it as though it were the most natural thing in the world that it should have come to take him off upon his duties as—no matter what. Anything, in fact, but a Guardian of the Poor, for he would never send anybody to the workhouse, partly because it was the worst thing you could do to anyone and partly because Catherine so often said she would end her days there. . . . Everybody laughed and Mordaunt pulled him out roughly, and he stood shivering and bewildered as the carriage drove off without him, the two little old ladies turning their heads and waving their handkerchiefs.

"I've got a shilling," cried Mordaunt. "I'm going to spend it."

Stephen felt something hard in his hand. He did not know how it had got there. Mordaunt had given the name to it and he decided that he would buy a new dress for Annette because he had heard her say she wanted one. Annette hugged and kissed them all, danced up and down the house, ran out and came back breathless,

with crumpets and cake for tea, and eggs, fish, and a ptarmigan for supper. There was no going to bed that night. Annette played the piano, and Bennett sang song after song and nearly burst with breathlessness after rattling through "To Anthea":—

"Or bid me vanish quite away
And 't shall be so for thee—ee. . .

"Huh! Heuh! Heh! Ha!"

CHAPTER VIII

SOMEONE DIES

IN a family—births, marriages and deaths are all one. Something shifts. The family is uneasy, disapproving, anxious. It wants to stay still, but the tiresome and unruly individuals of which it is composed will go on breeding and dying, and the family turns uneasily and moans and groans in the pain of the kind of parturition which it cannot avoid, and it grumbles and growls and does its best to kill all enthusiasm, and accepts everything that happens with a mean scepticism.

“What! George in love? He always is. . . What! Jamie a genius! Can’t be, I’ve known him all his life!”

And George and Jamie, and Mary and Susan, struggle to escape from the family, and Mary and Susan escape into other families, but George and Jamie, after pretending to be married and respectable, and great men and successes, have to confess sooner or later that they are beaten, that the family is too strong for them and that they are only comfortable and honest and happy with Mamma, the matrix from which they have been evolved, permitted to go just so far as individuals as is useful to the family, which hates its individuals only less than all other families.

The chemistry of the family should be the paramount study of the twentieth century for, properly understood, the energy of its hatred might be turned to some good purpose. It might be persuaded to turn its corrosive powers upon the horrors of life and away from its natural

prey, love and spontaneity and good humour, all of which, being as natural to Annette as breathing, marked her down for doom by the family spirit in the Lawries. Her own family would have nothing to do with these Lawries, except to laugh at them, as the English always do laugh at the dour honesty of the Scots; for to the English, honesty stops short at having your accounts in order, and has nothing to do with the passions, the emotions, or the conscience.

Annette, therefore, was left to herself, for Bennett, helpless to extricate himself from the confusion created by James Lawrie's fanatical Scots honesty, which had long ago taken the turn into the unfathomable depths of mysticism, was no joke. He was one being at home, besottedly in love with his wife; altogether another in the stucco house where he became a possessed creature, sinking luxuriously into Jamie's honesty, with a purpose so deep that no one but he could have the faintest glimmering of it, and feebly enjoying the pleasure of seeing his own will swept away by Catherine's iron resistance to Jamie's purpose, whatever it might be. She was English enough, in all conscience, thoroughly imbued with the English idea of limiting honesty to accuracy and prudence, especially prudence, in dealing with pounds, shillings and pence, but when it came to carrying honesty into your vices, she was so horrified that she could not laugh at the Scots or at anything else. She had corseted herself out of all resilience. Her face could grin but her flesh was encased in thick cloth and whalebone and could not move. Its rigidity must have made her own flesh loathsome to her for she detested every fleshly operation save eating and taking medicine.

Like a true Englishwoman, she was devoid of logical capacity—(Oh! the deductions of the Anglo-Saxon mind!)—and assumed that people like these Lawries, who were honest about everything else, must

therefore be dishonest about money. She controlled the finances of her household, allowed her husband half-a-crown a week, received and apportioned the the expenses of her sons, and, though Annette did not know it for years, budgeted for Bennett, and through the entire Lawrie clan she sent a wail concerning her disastrous poverty, slandering right and left, circulating hideous stories of Jamie's debauchery—Fanny Shaw, Miss Meekin, the drunken sots at Hepworth's—and of Annette's immoral extravagances. Jamie and Annette she saw as the deliberate, wicked, remorseless and ceaselessly active enemies of her family, the Woods, who were in fact almost extinct in her. That was why she sat so still. She was convinced that if she did so, she would see all these Lawries in their graves and their money properly tied up, so that it should not be wasted and frittered away. She knew that they writhed under Jamie's disgrace and she kept them writhing, through the years imposing upon them the idea that they owed her compensation for her heroic endurance in supporting him, sharing her house with him, and not, as she might have done, procuring a divorce and dragging their name in the gutter. He had forfeited the right to the protection of her goodness and virtue, but she granted it to him.

Not even she knew how much she had enjoyed her terror of his violence, just as in the years of their marriage she had enjoyed the terror of his passion, that struck her own sensuality cold, until she sickened at her own voluptuous perversity, dreaded the touch of him, called her dread disgust, and drove him from her to the streets or the taverns, or his wild friends, whom she scorned and suspected, as she did all who were above or below the dead level of prosperous mediocrity that was the achievement of Thrigsby and its families, agreeing for a while in order to achieve repudiation of the old respectability of property, and to substitute the new respectability of

cash or brass. . . . As for Annette, she was the one being in the world who was worse and more dangerous than Jamie.

Annette belonged serenely and irrepressibly to the past, to landlords, and parsons and earls and benevolent responsibility, lightly and gaily borne, because the poor people are so much happier and work so much better if the gentle folk are gay ; and Annette had altered Bennett out of all recognition. She had even put ideas into his head about being a gentleman. Of course he was a gentleman, but Annette had made him think a gentleman was someone who was not dependent upon money, but lounged gracefully through life, taking his ease and putting on a supercilious and superior air, as though it did not matter what went by the board so long as he did not lose his manners.

Bennett, of course, like his father, like all the Scots, Welsh, and Irish, could act any part. He acted, Catherine was sure, one part with herself, another with Annette, another with Father Smale (that wicked High Church, Popery priest !), and another with himself. What, as audience, was Bennett to himself as actor ? That was what Catherine wanted to know, since your actor always takes his cue from his audience, and that was what she could never find out.

She had cracked that nonsense in Robin and Mark long ago, but there was no getting at Bennett. He was, of all her sons, the most vehement in condemnation of his father, so vehement, indeed, that he seemed to her to overdo it and to be playing upon the most obvious chord to divert her attention from the rest. He was stubborn. If he had not been stolen by Annette she could have broken that in him, and he could never have built up that wall of silence, which distracted and frightened her.

There was before her sons the example of what she had done, what she thought she had done, to their father, but

Bennett did not seem to be troubled by it. He was safe with Annette's boundless good-nature. When Catherine was more than usually bellicose, he had only to abstract himself and to think of Annette at home waiting for him, quick to go through the ritual of taking his hat and coat, bringing his slippers, carrying away his boots and then flitting into his arms, when he could hold her as the lovers do at the end of the play, while the audience (himself) sinks back with an almost audible sigh of relief that the hero (himself) is safe. . . .

No one is much concerned with the heroine, because the responsive element in an audience comes from the women, and every woman knows that every woman can look after herself; but the heroism of the hero has to be conceived and borne by a woman. Bennett's audience (himself) was like other audiences in being preponderantly feminine.

Annette just laughed at him for it, but to Catherine it was an usurpation on his part, for *she* should have been his audience, a real Roman audience with thumbs down all the time. That wife of his would not let him settle down, neither in one house nor in one church, and it was as much as Catherine could do to keep him in the one employment, a feat which she accomplished by persuading him that if he left it (hate it as he might) he would most fatally offend his Uncle Thomas, who had procured him the post in the office of his friends and neighbours and fellow-guardians.

Uncle Thomas was a terrible, relentless figure, whom to offend meant bottomless perdition, for Uncle Thomas was *the* Righteous Man and a person of all-subduing wrath. There was no evidence to support the myth of Uncle Thomas, but it was all the more powerful for that, and it was understood that if he were never so little offended he would leave all his money to the John Lawries who did not need it, but were like sponges mopping up all the little legacies that floated by. Uncle Thomas had always been

the one person of whom Catherine was afraid, and that alone was enough to make him a figure of dread.

That dread had always powerfully possessed Bennett, and he could not shake it off. It was in vain that he reasoned with himself and tried to believe that Uncle Thomas could do nothing, however highly offended he might be, suppose his nephew slid off on to the stage, or into a studio, or a monastery. Bennett always gave the impression of being on the point of sliding off into something, though he never did, but remained rather feebly and wistfully looking down his nose as though he were trying to see his own profile, a trick he had caught from Father Smale, whose profile was famous, and was always turned to his congregation while he preached to the lectern.

Father Smale was Catherine's most elusive antagonist. He had a little tin mission church in the slums at the back of the Lancashire-and-Yorkshire station, so scandalously High that even Bennett could not go there, but he was an active participant in the doings of all the half-dozen extreme churches in the various parts of the town; and when Father Smale was predominant in his existence, Bennett used to follow him round, no other celebrant and preacher being able to satisfy his ardour for salvation.

When Annette was in the ascendant, however, he stayed at home; and this was his most repulsive offence to Catherine, that he had mixed up his religion and his wife, and she knew that Annette was woman, that is, unscrupulous enough to take advantage of it. The thing was outlandish, heathen and un-Thrighsbeian, full to brimming with the very poison that decent, hard-working Puritan folk had fought so hard to eject when they had wrecked among others the Church of Annette's father, the Rev. Francis Folyat, that bearded mummer whose antics had so upset the Protestant community. . . .

Catherine's information always reached her through gossip, tinged and tainted with scandal, which she gulped

down greedily enough, the more greedily indeed for having been herself the object of so much of it, and she never sifted her facts or took any pains to become acquainted with the persons concerned, even when one of them was her own son. Poison enough were these Popish practices when they were carried on in church ; but when the spirit of them was brought into the home, as in Bennett's case, they were distilled into damnation.

Words in Catherine's limited imagination took on a terrible emphasis, so much so as altogether to obliterate both the facts and the ideas they represented. Her son, her youngest son, her most beautiful boy, was engulfed in Hell, with Father Smale standing on the edge of it with a pitchfork, and Annette as the raging, recumbent whore in the flames at the bottom of the pit. And she could do nothing. There was Bennett with a child being born every year, Annette breeding apparently in insouciant absence of mind, and the Lawries looking on at Catherine's discomfiture and making their wills (so she was convinced) according as she succeeded or failed. Annette's gay courage was to her eyes shameless defiance ; but when she attacked Annette, Bennett slid off to Father Smale, and when she attacked Father Smale he slid off to Annette and apparently made no effort to provide for his children, in whom he was fundamentally not interested.

Bennett had Faith as few men outside the saints have had it. He had faith in God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Ghost, Three Persons, with a fourth added in the Virgin Mary, and a fifth in his wife, Annette. They surely would see to the matter. He had no faith whatever in Thrigsby, though the town was designed for the provision of food, clothing and shelter for men, women and children, but so far as he could see, not in any sufficient quantity.

Thrigsby was to him a nasty, dirty town with a revolting climate that rained mud, full of noise and savage beings

who were bent on destroying everything he cared about, a certain ecstasy of emotion that stirred in him at the sight of Father Smale's profile, certain expressions in his wife's eyes and occasionally in the theatre, and nowhere else. He loathed nature only a little more than he detested machinery, and the monotonous rows of dirty windows in the factories and warehouses that surrounded the office in which he worked, in a street that ended with an almost vindictive appropriateness in a long, dark, ominous tunnel under the railway. He loathed it so much that he could not break away from it, though it had not taken him long to realise after his marriage that there was small hope of Thrigsby doing anything for him. In return he resolved to do as little as possible for Thrigsby, but to endure and to be hurt, since being hurt intensified the ecstasy that came to him every now and then. This was his private glee upon which nothing could impinge. Some day, something extraordinary would come of it—and he hoarded it.

He was regarded with some awe. Lawrie was a good name in Thrigsby, and at the back of it were the Greigs and the Keiths and the Allison-Greigs, all a little faded and old-fashioned perhaps, but solid and sound, men of whom tales had been told both before and after the Cotton Famine. "They had some brass put away, be sure of that." But sometimes there was a deadly quietness about Bennett that would have turned Medusa to stone. It paralysed even himself, sometimes for days on end, and it would take him weeks to repair the damage done during those days. It seemed to him miraculous that he was always able to recover in time, and he was haunted by the risk he ran, afraid therefore to embark on any undertaking.

It would be different if only some one would die. He was quite sure it would be different, though he never dared define that someone. It was not that he wanted

anyone's money. He had the conviction that someone had to die and then it would be all right. He would no longer have those days of almost death.

The idea, which he never breathed to a soul, had always been with him, as haunting as a smell, and the memory of a smell, and after that first ghastly year of his marriage it took an increasing possession of him until he found himself looking for that someone. It might be his brother Robin, or—Stephen : Stephen looked delicate enough. It was certainly not his father or his mother or Annette or Father Smale. Nor was it Miss Lawrie. Yet increasingly this idea of death, the very aroma of death crept over him and made him dream of a coffin all prepared and a grave all dug, while he could only prowl round and round them waiting for the corpse of someone, someone, someone, who should set him free.

His nickname in the office was Old Funeral. It was given to him before he was twenty-five and he was thirty before he heard of it. When he did so it was as though the walls of the place were closing in on him from the top, bending down to overwhelm him. The name had struck the mark and he was impaled. He wept many secret angry tears over it but never unburdened himself of his chagrin. It was concerned with the office, which he kept separate from the rest of his doings, never discussing his position or his prospects there even with Annette, even with Catherine, regarding his daily incarceration as the sacrifice he made for his children.

But the injustice of it rankled. "Old Funeral" indeed ! Why, when he was put to it, he could do a week's work in a day, and what a greasy-grimy rut the rest lived in—bawdy jokes, football matches, horse-racing, spasmodic enthusiasms, and their wives. Oh God, their wives ! The coarseness and the ugliness of the women of Thrigsby made it Hell indeed. They were hard, grimy, gritty and ferocious, but very pleasing to

Bennett's sense of the grotesque, which had been highly developed by his wife's sense of the ridiculous, and he would go out of his way in the morning and the evening to observe the slatterns of the slums, grimy as the streets, half dressed in greasy rags, all skinny and venomous, or blowsy and overblown with huge breasts and massive arms, their houses and their streets fuming with their reek, their children teeming in the streets. On the whole he envied them the completeness of their lives. They expected nothing and enjoyed what came, even though most of it was grim and disgusting, drunken brawls and deaths.

He was a little frightened by it and by his own pleasure in it, for the slums were ignored or condemned by people like himself who had good clothes, clean houses and enough to eat, but there was an effluence that came out of them that was necessary to him and to his dearest religious mysteries. He could no more try to understand it than he could try to understand why he had to eat, but he knew perfectly well that, for all the brave plans he made with Annette for journalism or the stage or the church, it made it impossible for him to leave Thrigsby or the office. He was part of it, and must play his part through to the end, whenever, wherever, whatever that might be. He could not explain this to his wife, who was a stranger, not assimilated, a softer, livelier and more careless creature, and he would let her talk and dream and plan while the mere thought of going made him tremble and go cold with a sense of shame and disloyalty and faithlessness.

He was committed to this life by the torture of his boyhood and could no more rid himself of it than he could of his nose, or his melancholy blue eyes, or his fine delicate hands that shewed so glaringly his unfitness for it. He was afraid of his hands. They were so like his father's. At the same time he was proud of them

because he would catch Annette looking at them with pleasure, and whenever he held them out to her she came to him and let him hold her in his arms with the warm delight that never failed, and made him sure of her as he was of nothing else, though she had long since ceased to respond to any other wooing, and never of her own accord give him a caress and loving word. She was too busy. He did not know with what. But she was always busy and up to some purpose which every now and then blew him up, and plunged him into a month or two of chaos, in which she would subdue the deep sullen revolt that rose in him by spitfire tactics, leaving him helpless, because when the storm was over there was no rancour in her and with her warm gurgling laugh she would say :

“ Now ain’t you glad I changed the room ? ” or “ Now isn’t it a good thing I made you leave that horrid house ? ” —or, “ Now it’s no good your looking for another Roman Street because I won’t have it. A stucco house I can’t abide and if you must have it, you must, but the children and I will go to the workhouse.”

He could not understand her, and was dogged by an uncomfortable feeling that she understood him perfectly. Every now and then she startled him by coming out with something that he had been at pains to conceal from her, and Mordaunt called his mother “ The Detective.” But Annette never pried. She just knew things. The tiniest hint was enough to put her in possession of the doings, the thoughts, the anxieties and the situation of her husband and her children, except Stephen, and for him she had no anxiety—there would never be any need to do battle for him. Her intuition was relieved of that much labour, and once she had made up her mind to it, was immeasurably strengthened for her increasing responsibilities. Bennett would not or could not break with his mother or the slums or Father

Smale. Very well then, she must put up with half a husband, do battle for that half—for assuredly Thrigsby would take that from her if it could—and all the more lay deeply grounded plans to baffle and in the end to defeat the enemy. She found herself in a strange unspoken alliance with Jamie, Stephen and Miss Lawrie and derived from it a splendid exaltation which every now and then made her laugh until she cried. She would throw herself on the bed and hammer on the pillows and laugh and laugh and laugh because Something—she knew not what—was so very funny, so wildly, gloriously funny.

It was all over—the long battle was all over, and nobody knew it, but herself. The enemy could do nothing but could not see it and would never see it for years and years and years and then something terrible would happen and there would be soldiers marching down the streets, and still the enemy would be able to do nothing to herself and Stephen and James Lawrie and Miss Lawrie and whatever it was that they were doing together. How sudden and tremendous it had been, the desire to take Bennett Lawrie! How unlike falling in love it had been, the strange writhing power that darted from her womb to her brain, numbing all her senses, until it had left her in an anguish to break on Bennett and cover him with a shining glimmer, so that he was spellbound and moved like a blind man towards her! And what a shame it was that he should be bullied and browbeaten and thrust aside when it had been her doing! Ah! There was nothing she would not do or suffer for Bennett, to make amends, nothing—short of disloyalty to those others with whom she was bound, though externally and practically she had nothing to do with them . . .

Why soldiers? The idea of soldiers made her think of herself for a moment as Joan of Arc, but she dismissed that as ridiculous. Play-acting must be left to Bennett.

She had work to do, because immediately on top of this revelation of the humour of her situation came a stabbing knowledge that there was going to be trouble about money. Why should there be? Aunt Maggie was dying and the old Lawries could not live for ever. Someday she would have a farm in Devonshire and there were Aunt Christina's houses.—But, you never know, the dearest and the noblest can be mean about money. Also Annette knew that through money the few became powerful and the many were rendered impotent. She did not know how it was done, but she knew that Bennett was a predestined victim and she knew that she was regarded as an irresponsible spendthrift.

Aunt Maggie died. A storm broke and there was not much room then for exultation or brooding or intuition. Aunt Maggie died, full of years and piety and saintly endurance of suffering and the chastity enforced by her wig, and she left five thousand pounds to be divided equally between her sister Mary Lawrie and her niece Phoebe . . . But Phoebe had assured Bennett, and Catherine had confirmed the statement as of her own knowledge, that Aunt Maggie intended to leave Bennett at least a thousand pounds "because he went to church." Phoebe had never told Bennett that she had told Aunt Maggie that he was under the thumb of Father Smale and almost a Papist, and Catherine had never told Bennett that all her letters to the dying woman contained wailings and gnashings of teeth over the extravagance and impudence of the Papist minx, his wife. Bennett had believed them and without a word to a soul he had borrowed fifty pounds to register two patents for a new kind of bicycle which was going to be made by a friend of his, who said that bicycles were going to revolutionise the world, bringing people out of the houses in which they were rotting, and sending life thrilling along the roads once more. It was to have been a surprise for Annette, who

had not known that when he was supposed to be at Father Smale's he was at Langdon's workshop, though he had been unable to resist the temptation to buy her a new dress—extravagant Annette, who all her life had had to wear her sister's old clothes, and, caring for his children, never complained that new dresses had to remain in her dreams.

"I'm done," said Bennett, miserably to himself, "they've got me. I'm done." And he was, for once in a way, shocked into a sufficient sense of the actual to be haunted by a picture of his mother and his sister falling upon Annette and rending her.

"Nothing left," he said. "Nothing left!"

Mr. Gordon, to whom Langdon had taken him for the money, was a Jew. Bennett had read about Jews but had never imagined that one of them could happen to him. Jew! There was a finality about the word, a sobering finality, a dead end.—"Down, Jew! Down, Jew!" That was what Mathias said in the play when the bells drove him into dreaming, dreaming of the murder, and the casting of the Jew's body into the quick lime. "Down, Jew! Down, Jew!" . . . How was it possible for life suddenly to become like a play, and *his* life of all lives, so simple and devout, and—and—and—domestic? He must have been bewitched to be so blind. Annette must have bewitched him. Yes. That was it, surely. It was a crazy thing ever to have married her, and everything that came of it must be crazy. It was no good deceiving himself about the position. Because he was married to Annette, Phoebe would not help him, she would not do the fair thing . . .

He would see what could be done. He would see what could be done. Langdon said the man who solved the problem of the bicycle would be a millionaire. Bennett did not particularly want to be a millionaire, indeed he rather hated the idea of being rich and arrogant and

irreligious, but there was that fifty pounds which had been spent and there was the interest, concerning which he had overlooked the fact that it was calculated *per mensem* and not *per annum*. He had been so sure of himself and so blinded by the need of the money that he had not even looked at the paper he had signed . . .

And Aunt Maggie was dead, and her money was passed on to two women who did not need it, and she had lived for over sixty years with no one knowing anything about her except that she wore a wig.

CHAPTER IX

MONEY

BENNETT bought himself a pistol and a cigar. He bought the pistol at a pawn-shop, saying it was for some theatricals, and the cigar at a little paper-shop to which his attention was attracted by a picture in the window of a man roasting himself alive and writing down his sensations. This picture was printed on a pink sheet called *The Police Budget*, which in that window had for years been part of his daily entertainment as he walked through the slums, providing him with visions of corybantic females, waving legs through clouds of frills, grim murderers, forgers, thieves and adulterers. And now he was to be entertained no more. He had become that shameful and immoral thing, a Debtor. —“The debtor attributed his failure to losses in speculation and extravagance in living.” That was how it looked in the papers. Bennett had always felt superior when he had read such words. He had known one debtor, a bright, gay school-fellow who had set out to wake Thrigsby up, and all that Thrigsby had heard of him was that he failed for nine thousand pounds with assets 1s. 0½d., and Bennett knew that he was living on the earnings of a prostitute. But that man was a scoffer and a light-liver and made a mock of the Church. One went to church to insure that such things did not happen to himself, and to a man with children such things did not happen.

The disgrace of it! The disgrace of it! He must tell no one, not even Annette, because once you told a thing like that, it was out and there was no knowing where it would spring up. He had been through that with his marriage: a secret crept out and some busy-body twisted it into a hideous caricature, and some one somewhere lost his temper and the women became hysterical and the fat was in the fire. Besides, if he told Annette she would be sure to do something. Annette always did something and thought about it afterwards. No—he could not even tell Annette. There were the patents. Langdon would put them through, and there was the—er—furniture. That sum would easily cover the debt.

He had borrowed the money when Phoebe had told him that Aunt Maggie had been given two months to live. Aunt Maggie had lived nine months, and nine months interest at ten per cent was—ought to have been—four pounds or thereabouts, but it was fifty—already as much as the original loan. Nine months! A fatal period of time in Bennett's life. Nine months and there was a baby: nine months and there was fifty pounds, and another baby and another fifty and another fifty and another—Steady! . . . Bennett slid into Auntie's, a bar much frequented by his colleagues. He lit his cigar and fingered his pistol. There was cold comfort in that.

The cashier of his firm cocked an eye at seeing Old Funeral in the place, and asked him to 'ave one. They had one and then another and the cashier asked after the wife.

"A good year this," said the cashier, "and the old man's put you down for a raise. Three ten a month."

Eh! It was not for nothing that one went to church and prayed. The Lord and Jesus and Mary must have put it in the old man's mind. They must have gone to

him and said : " Do this for Bennett Lawrie who is as David."

Bennett mumbled and the cashier went on :

" The old man never thought you'd stick it, for—after all, with people like yours, and that old dad of yours was in the Bank, and you've only to look at you to see that you've got brains. You got to push, you know, young feller. Push or be pushed, that's the law these days."

Three-ten a month ! He need not tell Annette. Mr. Gordon could have that until something turned up, or someone died. The patents would make money soon,—only : a hundred pounds ! Interest on a hundred pounds at ten per cent a month—a hundred, a hundred and ten, a hundred and twenty something. It couldn't be done. It simply couldn't be done.

" Knocked you a bit ! " said the cashier with a friendly grin. " O well ! families take a bit of keeping in these days, when it's push or be pushed."

There was a horrid sapless truth in that. Push or be pushed ! But how are you to push a Jew when you owe him money, and one pound in your pocket means five in his books. If the worst came to the worst, there was the pistol. Annette's brother had borrowed money to get married. He had had his honeymoon and then had taken a ticket for Bristol. Fred Folyat, poor, weak Fred Folyat. One expected that kind of thing from the Folyats who were always trying to behave as though they were county people, old Mr. Folyat being much more like a Squire in a book than a Parson in Thrigsby, and Bennett felt almost passionately that the pistol was not the way for a Lawrie.

Phoebe, perhaps to salve her conscience, sent him a cheque for twenty five pounds, " for the children," and wrote him a long letter saying that she was going to Switzerland and how delightful it would have been if

he could have come too, since he was the only one of her brothers she had ever loved and something to her that no one else could ever be.

"Beast!" said Bennett throwing the letter into the fire.

"Who?" asked Annette, who knew perfectly well.

"Mrs. Bromley," he replied, inventing a name and a character whom, thereafter, he regarded as responsible for all his troubles. Mrs. Bromley being a composite of Catherine, Phoebe, Annette and the defunct Aunt Maggie, had a power of concentrated feminine will on which he was able to draw in his feeble moments. She gave him strength now to say to Annette:

"Would you mind if we left this house and went and lived within walking distance of town? I don't think I can stand the train journey. Besides we could go to the theatre."

"O!" Annette thought it over. He was talking in such a strange voice, which then and afterwards she called his "Bromley voice," a vibrant, weakly bullying voice that paralysed all her energy and made her acquiesce, for the moment, in what he wanted, as though he were a sick child to be coddled and spoiled into acquiescence in the wiser purposes of his parents.

"You don't like being out of town?" she asked, squatting by the fire and dandling the poker. "I'm quite happy with the children, and if it's money you want for the bicycle, I don't mind not having any money. I never had any you see, because I was the youngest."

"Aunt Maggie's will makes a difference—a big difference.

"We have been counting on it. I could go out and be a nurse."

"Don't be silly. As if I'd let my wife go out to work as long as there is a hand's turn in me. I think it would be better if we were in town and safer."

Annette stared at him in alarm at the word, Catherine's word, the "shut sesame" of her existence.

"You, you, aren't going to write or paint or—or—act or any of those things that we have always talked about? Inventors never make any money because people rob them. It takes a lot of money to make an invention successful and when there's a lot of money the people who do the work never get any."

She felt that this talk of money was more than she could bear and began to laugh and to tell him stories of the children, until suddenly he caught her to him, held her between his knees and rocked her to and fro. Even then he could not tell her. The possibilities were too awful, but he had reckoned that if he cut out his train fare, took a cheap weekly house and ate as the boys in town, every other day, eating one day, drinking the next, he could, with luck, keep his end up as a respectable person for six months or a year. O! little warm, comfortable Annette! A hard world for love and lovers, fighting their way against Jews and jealousy!

"I've made you happy, Annette!"

"O! yes, indeed, Bennett. Yes, indeed! There's nothing but you, Bennett, and it would be just the same if you were a ragged wretched man. It would always be like this."

"You're not afraid, Annette?"

"Why should I be? I never thought I'd have the tenth part of what I have and I'm only sad sometimes because I'm in your way—a clever man like you."

"Clever? Hush! the only clever thing I ever did was to marry you."

She patted his thin cheek for that and said:

"If you don't mind, I don't. I never mind anything, I'm such a foolish creature and I know my happiness irritates you. I can't help it. I should be happy if I were dying. You never would believe me when I said

they'd never get your father down. You think they have—I know I'm the wrong woman for you, but—but——”

“God damn it!” cried Bennett with a sudden blaze of passion. “How can you be the wrong woman for me when I love you?”

And he was almost glad of his disaster. He, too, would show that he was tough. They could take everything from him, but they could not take Annette. They had tried hard enough in all conscience in that first year and ever since, and here was Annette more his than ever. . . . But still he could not tell her, because he loved her and because she was his and would be his however shamefully he treated her, a certainty which forced him to put it to the test.

“Not a dark house, Bennett. I can't bear a dark house.”

“I promise you I will not take a house until you've seen it.” He began to swagger a little. “After all, why should we run away from Thrigsby? I'm sure it's wrong. It's a good old town, a good enough old town, though pretty full of Jews and foreigners.”

“Is it?”

“Yes. The cotton trade is so enormous that the foreigners have to come here, and that makes business difficult, because you can never trust them.”

He was quoting from a pushing friend of his, a broker. He did not know and did not want to know even that much of the cotton trade.

He found a house, not too bran new, and not too obviously cheap. Annette had been putting two and two together and had fairly accurately guessed his plight. The concealment of it hurt her deeply, but she hugged the hurt until she loved it; and the plunge into Thrigsby appeared to her as a great adventure, one, moreover, that most deeply satisfied her instinct.

It was not for nothing that her father had given up his pleasant living in the luscious South, where there were figs and peaches on the walls and palm trees growing in the sheltered coves : it was not for nothing that she had met Bennett and been swept away as by a flood, laughing, crying, singing to herself as, like Ophelia, she drowned : it was not for nothing that she had battled with Catherine and made a friend, a life-long friend of Miss Lawrie, who alone was serene and detached and, like her own spirit, content to wait. Well now ; if she must wait for Bennett to tell her of this thing that had trapped him, she would wait. There was a new silent, mournful strength in him of which he was more than a little afraid. It was as though its discovery had startled him, so that he was bent on being that and nothing else. He became more than ever fastidious about his person and his clothes and took immense pains with his hands, which, however, he did not attempt to use. If he had to go down into the mud of Thrigsby, he, for one, would not make a splash. Whatever happened he would be clean, and it was about this time that he formed the habit of chanting to himself, in imitation of Father Smale's renowned intoning : " Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean : wash me and I shall be whiter than snow." Sometimes he would put a vicious emphasis on the word "*wasssh*," and repeat the phrase over and over again.

The house he had chosen for its proximity to St. Martin's Church, one of the half-dozen assisted by Father Smale. It had been famous for its ritual but the Rector was very old, the High Church cause was well nigh lost, and the district in which it was situated had collapsed into rows of little new brick houses stretching across the comely gardens of old mansions, some of which were left derelict, and it had become at once, though Bennett did not know it, a centre, under the protection of the police,

for women of a certain trade. Hence the cheapness of his house, of which Annette took possession cheerfully enough, though she did not like it. It was, at any rate, not dark. There hung over it the shadow of the disaster of which Bennett, as yet, had told her nothing, but she was prepared to go through it with him, her hand was in his. It seemed that they had to be punished for being in love, and she did not complain. All the same she was shocked when one night, being alone in the house and the children in bed, she went, on a knock to the front door, to find a strange man standing there.

"Is Louisa in?" he asked.

"No," said she in her astonishment.

"You'll do," said the man, and he tried to come in.

She called "Bennett! Bennett!" The man shuffled away, and she leaned, faint and sick at heart, against the wall. What kind of a world was this? What manner of place was this Thrigsby in which anyone would "do" . . . ? All the fight in her lithe body was roused, all the ferocity of her spirit, that poured like molten steel through her, was roused. Did Bennett know? Was he a simpleton? Had he no idea of the kind of people there were in the world, of the kind of women who lived on either side of them?

Jamie knew. He knew his Thrigsby as he knew his own hand and he laughed until he cried when Annette laid her predicament before him, patted her hand and told her she need not be afraid, as she would never "do." She could laugh then with a sweeter, deeper laughter for Jamie's kindness. It was wonderful how much easier and more tolerable everything became through his presence, the maligned, discarded, old man.

He always came to see her on Sunday mornings when he knew Bennett would be at church, playing his part in the tail that streamed after Father Smale in his comet-like swoop over this or that district. He knew that he

gave Annette the heart for her babies, which they never discussed openly though, in fact, they talked of nothing else as they exchanged jokes about what Jamie called the "collapsed" people of the town and argued as to whether his end or hers was the more wonderful in the production of grotesque incredible beings.

"A collapsed inferno, this town. No one believes in it any more. Look at all the big firms being turned into limited companies with the old families retiring on their dividends and leaving the management to men who would not have been good clerks in the old days. They've bust the business, they've bust the banks, they've bust the newspapers, they've bust the church, they've bust the theatre, they've bust everything but me and you . . . ?"

"And Bennett," said Annette stoutly.

"Well, well, we'll see. Bennett has the makings of a character. He must have, to have found you for a wife."

He began to tell her of the people he had known in this part of the town when it was an elegant and most respectable suburb, inhabited by people who really believed that they thought to-day what the world would think to-morrow, and that they had established for ever a prosperity so full of honesty and vigour and high-mindedness and the so obvious virtue of Free Trade that the whole world would be irresistibly converted and sweep away the remnants of aristocratic corruption; and lo! before the next generation had set to work their commercial paradise was invaded by the jerry-builder providing house room for the enormous new nondescript population come apparently from the ends of the earth to share in the paradise which by their coming they destroyed.

"Why did your delightful idiot of a father come to Thrigsby?" asked Jamie.

"My mother had four daughters," answered Annette.

"And they were to marry the millionaires—Heh?"

"Well—they didn't."

"The millionaires—if there ever were any—have hopped. Did they marry millionaires?"

"They married. That was really all my mother asked."

"And that brother of yours, the rolling stone?"

"Serge? He'll always be a wanderer, and I shall never settle down. Bennett would, if I would let him. He would collapse, like all these other people, and be a victim, working for as little as they choose to give him. They're hard on Bennett because he is a gentleman and looks so nice and always wears good clothes . . . Do you think it matters the children going to the Board school?"

"Why should it?" That was Jamie's way, always cheerfully to sweep aside a prejudice with a "Why?"

"My mother thinks it is dreadful for them to mix with the common children. She thinks Bennett ought to have done better."

"Has Bennett done so badly? I should say the man who has married you has done as well as anyone of his generation."

"But the money . . ."

"Don't talk to *me* of money," laughed Jamie, taking out his foul clay pipe and filling it with the sailor's twist he had taken to in his old age. "What can money do for you that you can't do for yourself? Either you have the one thing in the world that matters or you haven't, and no amount of money can alter that. I have it . . ."

Annette turned from her cooking with a startled expression.

"Aye," said Jamie, "I have it, though I don't look like it. What *do* I look like? An old clo' man?—Not with my nose. I wonder why they could never see that they could not beat a nose like mine, or yours either, for

you've a fine nose, my girl, a fine nose, a thoroughbred nose, and a trim little figure, and I vow you're a good cook."

"A good hand for pastry."

"The cooking in my house is vile: though it isn't my house, but Robin's. You'd know that by the cooking, for Robin can eat a bad egg without noticing it."

Annette laughed at that and Jamie chuckled!

"I've seen Robin eat a boiled worm with his cabbage."

"Ugh!"

"Well, well, perhaps it isn't fair to tell such things . . . I was talking of the one thing worth having—all the more worth having if the rest is hard. What can harm you if you've that in the house, the sweet light in your eyes and the warm song in your heart. What can you give your bairns for start in life or for education but that?—I have it: aye, but spread out thin, shared with dogs and cats and mice and drunken men, and wrecks of women. Seek love in the pity of others' woe. In the empty and outcast seek love there . . . You read?"

"Poetry? No."

"You don't need to. You *are* poetry."

The old man was a fine flatterer and a great wooer still. It pleased him greatly to be making love to this little daughter-in-law of his, whom, through Stephen, he understood so delicately.

"Aye," he said, "a young woman, cooking for her lover! Where's there a finer theme than that, and where's there a better joke than the lover's wicked old father eating all the best before he comes?"

"You're not wicked," protested Annette.

"I'm damned," said Jamie, "damned because there's no harm in me. That makes me awful to live wi', a man that has no vice but what's poured out of a bottle."

Sometimes his irony was so deep that Annette could not follow him and was afraid of being dragged out of her

depth. She never knew what he really thought of himself, whether he felt his disgrace, or accepted it, or laughed at it. His face was tragic. He must have suffered agonies, but his eyes were full of an unfathomably sweet humour. It was they really that made him so handsome, a thousand times handsomer than Bennett would ever be. There was something unutterably callow about Bennett, as though his escape into marriage had been too much for him, and for that Annette blamed herself.

It was as though Jamie felt that too, for, on these Sunday mornings that he liked to steal with his daughter-in-law, he was at pains to be lovely with her and to give her the understanding and the delicious light-hearted wooing that she sorely missed in her anxieties, which she neither took nor desired to take over-seriously. He admitted her to that wonderful world of which she had glimpses every now and then when Stephen would condescend to chatter like the child he could not avoid being now and then, when the strange happiness that was in him brimmed up and over, a world of terrible griefs and mighty joys that was entirely untouched by the world in which she had to live, the world that had become so unaccountably narrow and cramped and stifling, so that no joke in it was a good joke and the edge had been taken off all suffering and she had a curious flat sensation of pretending all the time, pretending to be a woman and a mother, pretending everything except her love for Bennett, which also was oddly arrested and captive. There were times when it seemed incredible that she could have had all those children. Sometimes when she looked at them they seemed to be dwarfed and fantastic and to have nothing at all to do with her.

Stephen was different. Stephen had escaped. There was no need to worry about him, but about the others she worried a great deal, because life had been wrung

out like a dish cloth and she could not see at all what was going to become of them. It was not lack of money that worried her but lack of life. Her own brothers and sisters had one by one come to grief, stopped short, squeezed out, and they had all been jolly people with every opportunity, so that it was not only the dismal, gloomy Lawries hiding away in their Jamie-stricken family. Jamie in fact was the most alive of the lot, the only human being who held his head up and looked forward and beyond the immediate hushed devastation.

It was not fair: that was as far as she could get in trying to think it out. One tried to be good, one went to church, one went to Communion as often as possible, one had a baby and one was churched, but the old people seemed to have dwindled away into aunts and uncles who either died and didn't leave you money or left you money in their wills and didn't die; the young people could do nothing but wait. It was too bad. There seemed to be no point any more in being good or in being ladies and gentlemen, but what was to be done when in all innocence and all love she had had half-a-dozen children only to find that there was no life for them to live? It was a sickening sensation, an appalling responsibility. She taught them all that she had been taught as a child, but could not, and knew that she could not, communicate her own child-like belief in it. This was a world in which any woman would "do." That seemed to be the essential trouble of it, and how could she explain that to the children? Often she thought that it was a blessing they were poor. They had a little hope of happiness, for from what she heard of the doings of her rich relations the more successful you were in this new kind of world the less you could breathe and laugh and love. As for Bennett's wealthy uncles and cousins there could have been no grimmer warning of the futility of external

well-being. Thinking of them she made up a little song to sing to her babies :

“Poor man’s children ! Oh what fun !
Silver moon and golden sun.
Baby, with the stars so bright
Fill your pockets. So good-night.”

Only her father, James Lawrie and Miss Lawrie were not submerged. They had had strength and character enough to insist on their right to prefer, if they chose, simple human relationships to the fantastic excitements of any Eldorado, with its drinking shops and gambling hells. Annette knew her *Pilgrim’s Progress* by heart and her morality and, indeed, her inexperienced vision of the world, were very largely based on it. Had not her attention first been called to Bennett by some one idiotically declaring that he was a perfect Apollyon ? And the joke had turned out to have some truth in it, for Jamie always seemed to her like a person out of Bunyan, and there was a good deal of the devil in him, for there was no knowing where or when he would break out next.

“If you ever have to choose between money and anything else in the world,” he said, “choose—anything else. It may lead somewhere. Money eats its own tail.”

It seemed to Annette that she was not going to have much choice. It was going to be as much as she could do to supply the needs of Bennett and the children. No day was long enough for all she had to do and there was no one to understand or sympathise with her but the disreputable old man, her father-in-law and his sister, Miss Lawrie, who lived ninety miles away among the fells and the lakes where she had made such a comical hash of trying to earn her living by teaching horrid little Deedy Fender. Without that rumpus she would never have met Bennett, who would most certainly have married someone else since he was in a mood to throw himself away . . . It was wonderful how things happened

for the best. Annette knew that Jamie was intensely grateful to her. Had she not given him Stephen, and most wonderfully allowed him a free hand with the boy?

"You mustn't mind," said Jamie, "you mustn't mind if Bennett makes a mess of things. Thrigsby is out to make an end where it began with me and my cousin Hubert. It wants the triumph of vulgarity and, by God, it means to get it. It wants to taint and poison the whole earth with a good conscience and make an end of all our nonsense about love and religion and art."

Annette wondered if he shared her instinctive knowledge that Bennett had already made a mess of things and was overwhelmed by a disaster of which he was ashamed to tell her, afraid perhaps even to admit to himself.

"He is his father's son," said Jamie drily, "and I made a mess of things from the time I was forty. Success was so tedious, so tedious, so tedious, and so unjust. I'd rather suffer injustice myself than inflict it on another human being. Some people are all the better for being hurt. The others break: one mustn't hurt them, one must not hurt them, and after all, a good joke goes a long way my dear, a damned sight longer way than anything else. People like you and me are paid in jokes. The good we do is subtle and invisible and there is no price on it."

"I'm really hopeless," laughed Annette. "I'm awfully untidy and extravagant, and money flies and I never can remember where it goes, but there is always some one at the door calling for 'the settlement of the little account please, Miss——' They always call me Miss, for no one would ever believe I was married and the mother of a large family."

"You will always be the perfect mother, younger than your youngest child," said Jamie, shaking his head dubiously, and a little enviously thinking of the tragedy

of his own devastated fatherhood. Bennett was secure against that at any rate: too secure in it indeed. He need travel no further than his own home for fulness of life, excitement and entertainment, for Annette had the power to puzzle, dazzle, excite, exasperate, satisfy and mystify any man, so that he would never be able to desist from exploration of her rich nature.

"I think you and Bennett are to be envied," said Jamie. "I know of no one from the Queen of England down who should not envy you. The world can do nothing to you, but keep you short of money."

"That's what I say, and what does being short of money matter? Only Bennett—Bennett thinks that if only he had a chance——"

"Bennett? What better can the boy do than make love to you? I'd trust you if my eyes dropped blood through misery, and whatever Hell you dragged me through."

"Why!" cried Annette. "That is how I trust Bennett! How wonderful!"

She took the remnants of the pastry from her pie, fashioned it into an elaborate monogram J.L. with the L. embracing the J, and showed it to him merrily, telling him that that was what he got for coming to cheer up his poverty-stricken daughter-in-law and giving her the heart to shuffle through another week.

"My own people say: 'Poor Annette,' and leave it at that. Perhaps they only mean that they are going to leave Thrigsby for ever and I am the only one of the bunch to be left starving in it. In a large family everything is put off on the youngest."

"Even Bennett?" asked Jamie slyly, and Annette went off into peals of laughter, because if you had a sense of humour that was quite a fair version of her romance, of which she did not expect everyone to know or to understand the glowing, golden inwardness.

CHAPTER X

DISASTER

ANNETTE had always thought it better to spend money on country air than on doctor's bills, and her objection to her children being educated at a common school had been a very practical dread of the risk of epidemics. Hardly had Bennett defied her theory by plunging into Thrigsby than Mordaunt and Audrey were down with scarlatina. Stephen had been taken off to the stucco house by Jamie, who by four months outrageous conduct had earned for himself years of contemptuous separation from his family. The contempt might be painful but the separation was necessary. To punish him Stephen was forbidden the house, but he settled that by going and fetching the boy and bringing him in by the back door, and Stephen settled it by despondently hanging on the point of death until he was fetched. The hostile four swallowed their defeat and looked the other way. The ascendancy of the dictator of the family was broken, but, to avoid hurting her feelings, everybody agreed to pretend that nothing had happened. She retired to her bed, shut the windows, drew down the blinds, had an enormous fire lit, and on the hob kept a kettle with a long spout that filled the room with steam.

Surprising things happened. Uncle Mark had arranged that his holidays should coincide with Bennett's and insisted that they should go to London together. Uncle Mark had found Uncle Robin's traveller's airs unbearable,

and thought it time to show that others also could visit the Metropolis and see the Tower and the Crystal Palace and the Monument. Bennett tried to make excuses but Annette was wild with excitement. Any movement away from Thrigsby filled her with an almost religious ecstasy, and on the whole she would rather have Bennett or her children go because she was afraid for them, never for herself, and, as it was she who had all the fun of the household, it seemed only right that the others should have all the external pleasures there were. Also it postponed the evil day when Bennett would have to confess his troubles. It was not the troubles she minded so much as the pain he would suffer in having to confess to herself and possibly to his mother, confronting him with the old impasse that made him so helpless, filling him with resentment of the savage neglect he had suffered in the early days of his marriage.

Annette was incapable of resentment, tying her down to the past, but even more she disliked anticipation because it removed the element of surprise from existence. She much preferred things, good and bad, pleasant and disagreeable to "turn up." Something always happens if only you do not interfere too much, but there!—these Lawries were an interfering lot, Puritan to the core, jealous of their Puritanism, and so hemmed in by it that they simply could not help doing terrible things, rather than admit that they had been, or ever could be, in the wrong. Annette on the other hand never expected to be in the right. She knew she was a bad housekeeper, an incompetent nurse, a reckless and careless mother,—in fact, the worst kind of wife Bennett or any other man could have had. She was astonished and grateful that her children, especially Stephen, managed to go on living, but they had all survived the most critical years, and there could not possibly be worse ahead . . . whatever it was that Bennett had to confess.

He wrote jubilantly from London, where he saw her brother Serge, just home from or going to Ashanti or Zululand or China, or somewhere where there was a war, and Minna and various friends of Miss Lawrie's to whom he had introductions. He even went and saw Henry Acomb in his dressing-room, and he and his brother Mark went to the theatre every night or to the Egyptian Hall, or to a concert at St. James's Hall, though Bennett did not care for classical music, a perverse passion of his brother's. They stayed at Uncle Robin's hotel near Blackfriars Bridge, a hotel frequented by Scotsmen and patronised by the Rev. T. Lawrie on his only visit to London. They saw the guard changed at St. James's Palace and they saw the Prince of Wales drive out from Marlborough House. Annette cried over his letters because never once did he say he wished she were with him, though he did say that he was longing to come back to her. She began to hate that pallid brother of his and to think that the holiday was a move on the part of the Lawries to take him away from her. After what they had done over Aunt Maggie's will, one must be ready for everything.

It was lonely at night and she very rarely saw anyone during the day except perhaps the doctor, who always called if he were in the street, because a few minutes talk with her cheered and comforted him in his dreary round of maternity cases and childish ailments, and the children were more and more running wild and finding their own way and their own acquaintances and amusements. They seemed only to need her when they were ill, and Annette ached with dread of the thought that she might never have another baby to keep her alive and loving and passionately content.

Her own family had turned up their noses at her. They laughed at her because they hated the Lawries as stick-in-the-mud, carping, self-righteous people. The

Folyats were for movement and gaiety and for avoiding any serious problem that might crop up. Annette agreed with them but there was no avoiding the Lawries since she had married one of them, and it was not a little base of her brothers and sisters to leave her to wrestle with her problem alone. Yet how could they understand how could they appreciate the awfulness of Catherine? Thrigsby had insulted and done its best to ruin them and with their gracious smile they had acknowledged defeat and retired to their beloved estuary in the south, where there were no chimneys and no smoke, and nobody did any work except the few fishermen who lolled out to sea once or twice a week, and the postmistress who was very busy reading everybody's letters and spreading everybody's business abroad. Why must anybody work? The Folyats had never worked. They had houses and farms and there was money coming in from India and the West Indies. Really it was most extraordinary how a place like Thrigsby could have happened, and how the common people could have been permitted to make money! They did nothing but harm with it when they had it. They made all that smoke and ugliness and they made Bennett miserable and frightened.

Annette tried to think it out while he was away, but she could only feel, and her feelings were hemmed in by these Lawries, so much so that at last she dreamed that the most awful of them, Tom, came to her and said:

"You have ruined your husband."

She tried, like a good Folyat, to smile at him, but her face froze and she could only nod her head and say that it was quite true but that it did not matter because Stephen would explain everything.

It was the most vivid foolish dream and Annette attached importance to her dreams. They always meant something though not exactly what they said. And she had another dream in which Catherine was young and blooming

in a garden waiting for someone who was not her husband, and Jamie came and stood tragically in the moonlight and was terribly nice about it and said she could go and be happy if she must : whereupon Catherine turned at once into her old, hard, whale-boned self and called him a disgusting beast and waving her fat hands in the air cried :

“ See what you have made of me ! ”

Annette thought herself very dreadful to dream such things and yet she could not away with them, for she could never accept the Lawrieian view of Thrigsby or the Thrigsbeian view of the Lawries. They must believe that there was something to be gained by their endurance, since no one could indulge in endurance for its own sake. Besides, if it were a matter of mere endurance, she could beat them at their own game and laugh into the bargain.

She felt vaguely that Bennett was not going to be the same after his visit to London. The Lawries had pounced just at the right moment. She had done her best to make him as young as herself and she had failed. In his slow deep way, he too had been thinking, and the result would be long in emerging to the surface. Some profound disappointment had crept into his entrails. Perhaps old ambitions had taken possession of him and it had been almost more than he could bear to come back to his responsibilities. She would rather, a thousand times rather, have had him not come back than appear as he did with a lugubrious mask of duty. But then he was in love with her and she with him and it was impossible to talk about anything else. Love was all the stronger for the failure of the rest, which perhaps it had induced, because for years and years neither she nor Bennett had had eyes or thought for anyone else or for what was happening even in their own lives outside the fairy circle of their love, which estranged them from people who apparently were concerned only with clothes and food and bills.

There was no doubt about the change in Bennett. It was not that he no longer loved her, rather more, but he seemed to be set in a curious ghostly and rather theatrical dignity, to be making a mystery about something and he was more awfully intent upon religion and the church than ever before, and this put a painful emphasis upon a difference between Annette and Bennett, because religion for the Folyats had been a happy, gay, kind thing, a matter of putting a surface on life through which nothing, not even the most dreadful tragedy, could break; whereas for Bennett it had become a force that could and should and must break the surface of life, a revolting easy smoothness for which there was no excuse.

For him there was in religion an intense clarification of everything that in life was so obscure and about which he was so miserably inarticulate. He was proud, and exulted to be a miserable sinner when there was in the church so supreme an engine of salvation, whereas to Annette, like a true Folyat, the church was a place to which, however mean and idiotic you might have been during the week, you could go on Sunday and sing psalms and hymns and be glad that the world was full of men and women, so full that there was never any knowing what might happen, and there was no dream so extravagant that it might not come true. Who for instance could have believed that Annette, the ugly duckling of her family would find and hold a handsome young lover? Yet it had happened, it had happened tremendously and who could tell what would and would not come of it?

Bennett brought presents from London for all his children and for his wife, but until he had been to church he could hardly speak. He needed to pray and to confess, in a long series of more or less fictitious sins, the terror that had seized him on his return to the confined intensity

that he had made of his life. How could love so rasp and warp and isolate? For that it was love, this possession that made it torture for him to be away from his wife, there could be no doubt, for it was stronger than himself, stronger than everything except his religion to which he clung so that the work of destruction should not be complete. It had blinded him and made him a swaggering fool, otherwise he would never have gone near that horrible Jew or Langdon, and he would never have made a parade of all his ridiculous talents, painting a little, writing a little, acting a little, even having the impudence to sing at club concerts and jumble sales in parish rooms, going round and round making a circus-parade of himself, while Annette childishly clapped her hands and said how wonderful he was. Wonderful!

He thought bitterly of the years gone in such gross and fatuous pleasures and how, but for such waste of himself, he would have grown naturally from an acolyte into a lay-preacher and mission-worker, and from that into a deacon, from a deacon into a priest, from a priest into a canon, and from a canon, winning fame and unpopularity by devotion to the cause of temperance, to a bishop living in a palace and being my lord, while Annette would only be Mrs. Lawrie. He would not even notice his children then, except occasionally to visit them in the nursery, whereas, in horrid fact, the children never let him alone. Annette seemed to have no control of them. They were given the room at the top of the house, but they were never there, and made a litter all over the house with their boots and caps and toys, and they wanted pennies for this and that, new clothes, new boots, birthday-presents: and they quarrelled and howled and snivelled and had colds and would suddenly be ill all together, then quiet for a little, a very little, and then burst uproariously into health. There could not be anywhere in the world a house big enough to contain his family,

and he shrank into himself in dread lest he should let loose upon them such a storm as had subdued and darkened his own childhood. It pleased him to think that Stephen, at least, was quiet in the dark house in Roman Street.

It was Stephen's fate, as usual, to precipitate a crisis. He had something of Miss Lawrie's gift for being in the wrong place at the right time. He was sent home in disgrace because he had been found watching the cat have kittens, and at once, as usual, he sickened. No attention was paid to him, for he always looked at death's door until Jamie or Tibby came to fetch him, but weeks went by and at last he complained of his throat, was examined by the doctor and declared to have diphtheria. He was at once isolated and abandoned himself to the disease with his usual completeness.

His symptoms interested him greatly until they became so acute that he was nothing but a swollen thumping head and distended throat and a burning aching little rag of a body. Vinegar-drenched sheets were hung over the door of his room and he gathered that this time he was certainly going to die, so certainly indeed that he took no further interest in the matter and went on with the game that Jamie had taught him of shutting out everything but the thought in his brain, or that other bodiless thing that lived both in and around him and swept him off so strangely into an acute inactive state of understanding, which could grow and glow into a kind of beautiful bud that swelled and broke into a drenching loveliness that left him gasping and swooning with love for whatever might be before him, the wall-paper, or a chair, or a cat, or his grandfather's hand.

Now he was absolutely clear of everything else. His body was just a burning ache that was no business of his. He had been down to the cellar and there was a smell there and that had made him burn and ache.

Everything was lovely, the light, the bottles by his bed, the shining brass knob on the bedstead, the shilling he had found in the snow a few days before, the grapes and the doctor's spectacles that glimmered over him and made him be well for a little, because that was what the doctor was there for, but Jamie was being hurt, Jamie was crying, and his father was being hurt, and his father was like the Man on the Cross, with blood flowing from his hands and feet and side.

There was a picture on the wall of Jesus Christ taken down from the Cross, and a woman held His head, and an angel held His hands, but the angel was all wrong. Pictures of angels always were wrong. Angels were not like that. Nothing, indeed, was like what people seemed to think it. Everything was like Jamie's voice when he grew and swelled and talked about the eternal horses. Stephen did not know what they were but he knew that they were true, just as sixpence or a shilling and what you could buy with them were false, though certain things, like Miss McAlpine's turnovers were very good to eat. If things chimed in with Jamie's voice they belonged to him. If not—he was unconcerned with them. They might belong to someone else, but that was not his affair.

This house in which a smell had turned him into a burning ache did not belong to him, though there were nice things in it, Annette's eyes, and his father's finger and thumb, always pressed tightly together so as to make a circle in which the whole of his father was contained, and the wad of uncooked pastry which he had carried in his pocket for days and days until it was hard and black, and the people next door who were having a sale and going to Canada, and the street and the mews at the corner which were full of straw and dung and horses that were not eternal or anything like it, but were merely put into cabs to drag people and their boxes to the station

when they could sit still no more and had to move. Stations were important. Almost more than anything else they chimed with the music of Jamie's voice and they were full of noise and steam and the beat of steel on steel—"clag, clog, dog, dig, dag, dog"—that was what the train wheels said to the rails and the watchful eagerness in himself catching at any power that would seize him and swing him away from the heavy, heavy quietness in which people slumbered, breaking it only with peevish voices and the munching of their mouths as they ate. . . "J'aime, tu aimes, il aime"; that was Aunt Phoebe's voice, but much, much more interesting was the "glug, glug, glug," that came from her stomach. "What rattles, what rattles against my poor bones."

One night the doctor took off his spectacles and shook his head over him, and Annette giggled and then began to cry, and at last Bennett came with a long face and a crucifix, and Stephen, seeing them all very clearly, thought that his body was very cold and he came back from his game to consider it a little more closely. His lips parted and he said: "Ah! no. No. Not yet." He thought he said it very plainly, but the others seemed not to hear him. They saw his lips move and brought a mirror for him to have a look at himself, which was not at all what he wanted. He saw two blazing terrifying eyes in a chalk-white face—he refused to accept it as having anything to do with himself. He heard Annette say:

"God has punished us too much."

"God's will be done," said Bennett in a broken voice. Stephen tried again and said:

"Not yet."

This time they heard him, for Annette flung herself towards him, but the doctor pulled her back and Bennett flopped down on his knees and began to pray with his face in his hands, an attitude which Stephen had always

disliked, for he had always known that you do not pray deliberately, but suddenly, wherever you may be, when you are seized and almost stunned with the violence with which from top to toe and from earth to Heaven you become a prayer . . . However, that was what they did when they saw his lips move, and Stephen knew that people always did the wrong thing when anything happened; the rest of the time they did nothing, nothing at all, though they pretended to be busy.

Something had happened while he had been ill, but exactly what he did not know for some time, though he understood that but for his illness they would have left that house, which was a terrible house, with a terrible landlord, and terrible neighbours and terrible drains, and the landlord did not want good tenants, but people who drank champagne.

There was a distracting morning one Sunday when Bennett swooped from the customary awful height of his father-hood and became human, saying—

“You boys must be very good to your mother.”

He said it so solemnly that Stephen wanted to laugh and, indeed, just managed in time to turn a snigger into a snort by diverting his merriment from his mouth to his nose. Apart from his laughter, however, he was elated because of the change in the house, in which there had begun the pressure with which he was familiar in the stucco house, the pressure of life, forcing men and women to reveal themselves in spite of all the antics they paraded to persuade themselves that they were somehow going to avoid such revelation and pass off a substitute. Without that pressure nothing could be accomplished, nothing loved, nothing enjoyed.

He had always missed it in the various houses in which he had stayed with his father and mother, who had lived hitherto in a ridiculous fantasy, Bennett for Annette playing the perfect Lawrie, and Annette for Bennett

playing the perfect Folyat, with the children, unimpressed, left to their own devices. That was over now and the house, the new house in Walker Street, throbbed to Stephen's elation with the anguish of love. He knew, Jamie had taught him even as a baby to know, that there is nothing else, nothing else from which to make sympathy and kindness, nothing else through which to know the glory and the power of being, which is the same, as Jamie had given his life to prove, for the poet in his ecstasy, than whom there is none finer or more rich, and for the drunkard in his misery and self-contempt, than whom there is none baser and more dense.

"All right," said Mordaunt gruffly with the harsh suspicion with which he met every advance from his father.

"And you, Stephen?" said Bennett turning with relief to his strange and innocently candid second-born.

"All right," replied Stephen. "I'll make the beds."

Bennett had to laugh at this unexpected practicality, though there was not much laughter in him since his life had suddenly been swept out of his hands as he discovered to his horror that, from the beginning in some mysterious way, he had been spied upon and that his mother and Phoebe and Robin and Mark and Tibby and Jamie and Uncle Tom and Miss Lawrie, the whole army of Lawries had known all his goings out and comings in, his follies and excesses and lapses, everything in fact except his virtues and his triumphs, and that they knew everything with a dreadful collective impersonal family knowledge against which he was powerless. There was no breaking with them. They would go on knowing just the same.

Annette, the children, his talents, his whole life were swept aside, and for a sickening few days there was nothing in the world but himself, thin, naked and weak, and his mother, bundled up somehow in a bed with the pain

of bearing him and going on bearing him. And she knew everything with a stupid kind of accepting, uncomprehending knowledge that weighed him down, until his head sank wearily upon his knees and he was an embryo again, just a part of her, nothing but a part of her that had been straightened out for a little and allowed to play a part and pretend to be a man and a husband and a father, only to have it all thrown aside so that he had to come back to her, with her big thighs and breasts and the rage that never ceased to smoulder in her . . . "From dust to dust," said the Prayer-book. It should have said "From woman to woman" . . . He felt sorry for his boys to have such a moment before them, to be allowed to go on living, only to be jerked back!

The jerk had been so violent that it gave him an ache in his neck and ever after that he had a habit of caressing the back of his neck and looking ruefully at his foot as though he would like to kick someone if he only knew whom.

Whatever the state of your affairs, there is no harm in buying a cigar, but it is inadvisable to purchase a pistol, for, like other fire-arms, it plays the deuce with the imagination. A man with a pistol in his house is like a nation with a navy, a potential suicide. He comes insensibly to believe that there is no difficulty that cannot be solved with a shot.

Mr. Gordon knew perfectly well, it was his business to know, that if Bennett were squeezed hard enough he could and would find the money. The Lawrie family were "good for" several thousands, and Mr. Gordon's only concern was with the question of how much he could divert into his own account at Cateaton's.

He was a little frightened by the Scots name, for he was familiar with the gibe that there is only one Jew in Aberdeen and he cannot make enough money to get out of it, and he could not realise that Bennett could really

be as indifferent to money and devoid of financial ability as he had shown himself to be. However, he knew his Thrigsby families, and was shrewd in estimating the effort they would make to avoid a scandal. . . Bennett, on the other hand, regarded the Jew, who in the adoption of his name had paid the Scotch a compliment, as his particular and private enemy and tormentor created by the Almighty to punish him for the blasphemy of his youthful errors—(Blasphemy was a great word with Bennett and he applied it to everything that he did not understand. His father was blasphemous, so was Mr. Gladstone, so was Darwin, so also was Annette in her frivolity). He did not see that Mr. Gordon had his eye first of all on his patents, which he parted with on the first squeeze, and secondly, on the enviable banking account of Mr. Thomas Lawrie of Cheadley Edge. He was amazed at Mr. Gordon's amiability. If the monthly payment was not forthcoming, Mr. Gordon waved a hairy hand and said he could wait : a young gentleman and a genius like Mr. Lawrie must not be impatient. A good fairy would come along presently and give him the position in life that was his due. (How could Mr. Gordon suspect that Bennett took no interest whatever in his various talents and wanted only to be a bishop ?)

For a time, for a year, two years, it looked as though Mr. Gordon himself was the good fairy, until one day Langdon sold up his forge and machine shop and betook himself to Birmingham where, he heard, these 'ere bicycles were going to be a big thing. Langdon had promised untold wealth. He had had most of the original fifty pounds that Bennett had borrowed and he had gone without a word either to Bennett or to Mr. Gordon, or, at least, so Mr. Gordon said. He was most distressed. He had advanced the money on Mr. Lawrie's name and because he was such a nice looking young man, and—and—he was very sorry, but he could no

longer be as lax as he had been. Three hundred pounds was a lot of money to lose, a lot of money, and he must insist in future on the interest being paid regularly or he would have to take proceedings.

Three hundred pounds! Three hundred pounds! Proceedings! Where in the world was there all that money? . . . Mr. Gordon watched Bennett's thin hands tremble as he fingered his hat, watched the fingers and thumb meet to make the circle of his captivity, and, thinking of Mr. Thomas Lawrie's banking account, decided that he had chosen the right moment to strike. Three hundred pounds was the limit, with a virtuous young man like that. With a rake or a spendthrift it would need more to frighten him into blackmailing his family, though even then there was no knowing whether he would not walk cheerfully over to the Bankruptcy Court. A difficult, anxious business, money-lending, and there is no end to the tricks that respectable people will play upon an honest usurer. Mr. Gordon thought three hundred pounds enough—to Bennett it was overwhelmingly too much. He had neither brains nor bowels nor nerves as he staggered out into the quiet street behind the newspaper office in which Mr. Gordon had set up his discreet brass-plate—Gordon & Co. Commission Agents.

“Pah!” thought the victim. “Bennett Lawrie! Idiot!”

Three hundred pounds! Three hundred Jews! And this town was one of the richest towns in England. There were men in it who gave three times that amount to some fool charity, and only the other day there was a story in the papers of a young man who had made one hundred thousand pounds by putting one thousand on a horse at 100 to 1, and here was he a householder, a parent, a churchgoer, to be ruined for three hundred, which he didn't owe, which he didn't owe. He had only

borrowed fifty and Langdon had had most of that. But Aunt Maggie—It was that old woman's fault! She had promised him at least a thousand pounds and all he had received from her estate were two illuminated texts—"Beloved, now are we the sons of God" and "Suffer little children to come unto Me."

Little children came, by God, they did, but they had to be fed and clothed and housed, and the poor wretch to whom they came was bound by them, fifteen years of bondage for each child, so that if, as seemed possible, he had a dozen children, he would be bound for one hundred and eighty years.—Nonsense! But not more nonsense than Mr. Gordon's arithmetic. Three hundred pounds! A hundred and eighty years!

He would have to tell Annette. There was no way out of it now. He would have to tell her or make her a widow, buy a ticket for Bristol as Fred Folyat had done, Fred Folyat whom he had so despised. But to make Annette a widow—little Annette in weeds!—would be to incur and to admit dishonour, and there was no dishonour here. It was Langdon who was dishonourable, Gordon, the Jew, with his compound arithmetic, who was dishonourable, the infernal town that in every direction had burst into knavery, that was dishonourable—So are they all dishonourable men—Ha! ha! So Thrigsby had done to him what it had already done to his father in his failure when Bell had bolted, and there was no room in Thrigsby for honest men, men who trusted their fellows. So Thrigsby thought it could turn him into a dirty, drunken old man like his father, ha? So Thrigsby thought it could break every one into its lousy, new-fangled ways, ha?—But defiance was too easy. He could get drunk on it, but it led nowhere.

There was the pistol. He had forgotten to buy ammunition for it, but he did not know what to ask for.

"I want some bullets to fit this pistol." He knew that sounded amateurish. People who were used to guns and pistols must have some kind of shorthand. They could just look at a pistol and say nonchalantly, "O yes, I want No. 4 or No. 6 or point something or other." But Bennett never could be nonchalant. He fussed over everything and made a ritual for everything that he did, even if it was only holding his pen poised over a ledger or a piece of paper, and he excited himself for days over this affair of the pistol. He could not get it out of his head, and did not try very hard, because it kept him thinking about the end of the month when he would have to pay Mr. Gordon and there would not be enough money.

At last he went into a gunshop and said—"I want some bullets to fit this pistol," and it reminded him of the horrible expensive visits to the tailors when he had to say—"I want a suit to fit this boy," and he felt that he was doomed all his life to be a father and nothing else, unless he were coward enough, or brave enough, to make Annette a widow.

But if he went home he could never do that. He would just lay his head on her breast and weep until his heart broke, and then she would put his heart together again and kiss his eyes and he would feel that nothing mattered in such a ridiculous world. And this thing did matter. It mattered so terribly that there was nothing for it but the pistol, the little cold thing that lay murderously in his pocket like the asp in Cleopatra's bosom, and this was a tragedy as great as Cleopatra's, though there was only a shabby little house at stake instead of Egypt and an Empire.

But what had Egypt, what had the Roman Empire contained of splendour and great grief and heroism that had not found its way through in the little shabby house that sheltered Annette, Annette and her wonderful,

glorious love?—O! Love, love, love! And was that love to end in the crack of a pistol-shot, in the cold steel burning into his brain and spitting out its poisoned lead to make an end? It looked like it. Bennett was frozen into coolness. He looked tired and ill, but he was calm and normal in demeanour, though he could taste nothing, not even tobacco. He went on smoking to conceal the fact.

He astonished Annette by helping her to put the children to bed (they needed more blankets and their rooms were shockingly untidy). He pulled the New Testament from his pocket and read aloud the story of the prodigal son:—"I will arise and go to my father, and say unto him, father, I am no more worthy to be called thy son." A parable—an earthly story with a Heavenly meaning. Why, all life was that, all life was that! How was it possible to go on insisting on the earthly meaning and reducing everything to money, a man's life for money, so that if he had not the money he must lose his life! And why, because fifty pounds could become three hundred, must life become nothing?

Of course that was how people became rich, by turning fifty pounds into three hundred and taking someone's life for it. . . . No one could suspect what he was thinking as he read the New Testament—no one could dream of his intention. He would kiss the children good night, and then he would send Annette to bed and pretend that he was going to stay up to read. She knew that he was in the middle of "Dombey and Son." Then he would steal out and go to a piece of waste ground there was just by the horrible school to which Mordaunt was going and at the end of the row of houses where Espinosa, the chief of the detective department, lived. Espinosa would investigate the story and perhaps something would be done to prevent Jews and rich men from turning fifty pounds into three hundred at the cost of some one else's

life . . Of course, if he did that, Mr. Gordon would not get the three hundred because no one could make Annette pay.

When he had put Annette to bed he could not leave her. Something in her eyes and brow had always fascinated him, but now they held him so that he could not move. It would hurt her more if he blew his brains out than if he were to kill her. He was part of her and the most precious part—his own will was nothing without hers, never had been, and it had been in foolish bravado and defiance of his own surrender that he had borrowed the money in the first instance. He could deceive himself no longer. It had not been to make Annette rich that he had made his fatal effort. She did not want to be rich.

Her own father had cheerfully grown poorer and poorer, sold almost all that he had in the vain struggle to stay the tide of poverty that crept up round and over the people of his parish, and she was just as cheerful. That was how the world was. The mills and the warehouses grew bigger and bigger and made more and more smoke and the poor people got poorer and poorer. It was not for her to understand it. It was for her only to laugh at it, and, if she could, to teach her husband and her children to laugh. She knew that she had a hard job of it with Bennett, because of his curious frenzied religion (which sure enough must be Scotch and like John Knox), but it was all the more worth tackling for that.

Bennett stupidly drew the pistol from his pocket and threw it on the bed. Annette raised herself and stared at it in horror.

“What’s that?” she said.

“I was going to use it.”

“O! Bennett!”

“Don’t touch it. It’s loaded.”

"Bennett! Benny, Benny, Benny!"

"I'm in debt."

"I know."

"How do you know?"

"I've been half-starved for months."

He groaned.

"I always have to wait for you to say things. But I can wait till Doomsday."

"I'm not worthy of you."

"Don't be silly. I love you."

It was always necessary for Annette to do something, and now, for want of anything better she got up and dressed. She screwed up the little remnant of her hair that had been so thick, her one glory, and savagely jabbed the pins into it.

"Who is it?" she asked.

"A Jew."

"What for?"

"You know. Fifty pounds for that bicycle idea."

"Fifty pounds. O! that's nothing. We can sell the furniture and move into furnished rooms."

"And the children?"

"Damn the children. We'll plant them out on our relations. They owe us something for the way they've treated us, trying to separate us and then telling lies about us when they couldn't . . . O! yes. Do you think that sister of yours hasn't done all this by telling lies about me to your stuck-up, frozen-faced relations, and my extravagance and the way I neglect the children and flirt with the tradespeople. Flirt! With my face!"

"You're not so ugly," protested Bennett surprised to find himself speaking and thinking normally. Annette's fury had blown the hysteria out of him. She laughed at him and asked—

"Are you sure it is only fifty?"

"It's three hundred."

She sat down suddenly and stared at him with goggling, horrified eyes and then went off into peals of laughter while he quivered with shame.

"But you said you were paying it off."

"I . . . I couldn't."

"Have you told your mother?"

"No."

"That's a wonder. She is generally told before I am. *Don't* tell her."

"I've got to tell someone. I've got to pay thirty pounds next Wednesday or go bankrupt, and lose my job."

"The best thing that could happen to you."

He made a grab for the pistol, but she was before him, touched the trigger by accident, and the bullet embedded itself in the wall. The report broke the tension between them.

She stood still thinking. It was quite true. That would be the best thing that could happen, if only he had not left it for so long, but he was tenacious in his obstinate silence. It would take him months and months to recover from the long strain he had been under. It was out of the question. It was too late. In a few months there would be another child, and, much though it was to be desired, a plunge into the unknown was unthinkable, though she was thinking it as hard as she could.

"We do come to grief," she said. "We do come to grief, don't we? We Folyats, I mean. Fred, and Minna and me. We never look ahead. I expect we enjoy ourselves too much, though you wouldn't think I had much fun, but I do."

"It's my fault," muttered Bennett, gloomily. "My father——"

"You'll never be the man your father was. He's thorough."

"So am I, it seems, when it comes to making an ass of myself."

"O! I hate you when you abuse yourself. You enjoy that anyhow."

"I enjoy you."

"O!"

She was mollified by the unexpected stab.

"It's got to be done."

"Three hundred pounds. Impossible."

"It's got to be done—I said that when I first saw you, Bennett, and saw how you were throwing yourself away on any pretty girl who ogled you."

"I wanted to throw myself away. I was so miserable. If I hadn't married you I should have been like George Wayburn."

(George Wayburn was a friend of the Folyats who had gone to the dogs and was known to be living on the earnings of a street woman.)

"You'd have been a pale young curate."

"I'd have been an actor."

(Ah! that was it! That accounted for the recklessness that had overcome him. He had not been the same since his visit to London.)

"Suppose you don't pay."

"I shall be ruined, sold up, thrown out and not a penny will anyone leave me."

He spoke of this as though it were the ultimate disgrace, as, indeed, Annette had learned that it was, it being his father's cardinal offence, not that he was a burden and a disreputable nuisance, but that he had been cut out of the wills of every Keith, Greig and Allison-Greig.

O! dear. There was no getting round *that* stumbling-block!

"Surely your mother will pay."

"My mother? Will a stone give blood?"

"What is going to happen to us then?"

"They'll take the children and look after them and leave us to starve."

"We're young, Bennett . . Did your mother have to go through anything like this?"

"My mother isn't like you. She broke my father. I've often thought about it. She got him down as—as this Jew has got me. I've often thought about it. That was how it was. Even now, if you have any money in your pocket, she takes it. She thinks she's beautiful and being kept in luxury. Ha! She thinks she's good and just like Queen Victoria! Ha! She thinks I never ought to have had a wife to take my money away from her. Ha! . . ."

"Don't talk about it, Bennett. You're getting too excited. She hurts you, I know. Dear God! Don't I know it? . . As if anyone could hurt you without hurting me. She knows that is the only way she *can* hurt me, and that if she could break you she could break me. She mustn't know of this. O dear! O dear! She mustn't know of this."

"Couldn't your people . . ?"

"The only decent one is Serge, and he's just like a tramp. He never has any money . . I did a dreadful thing when I married you, Bennett. I made everybody hate me."

"But why?"

"I married you because I wanted you. That's enough. There isn't a woman in the world will forgive me for that as long as I live . . And it *is* indecent when the other thing's correct. My people haven't any money. They've spent it all."

"Who then? Who? Old Frozen-face?" (This was Uncle Tom.)

"People are too cruel to give you money when you want it. They like to see you squirm and writhe. They shan't see *us* do that."

"No . . . no . . . no." Bennett felt miserably weak compared with the furious termagant that had suddenly sprung out of his wife.

"It's a terrible lot of money, and the tradesmen seem to know, for they've been awfully rude lately and won't send a thing without, without—"

"And you haven't had it?" cried Bennett. "O! You dear, you brave, you dear, lovely—O! God, why did God make me such a fool, such a shut-up quivering fool? Blast them! If they'd only left me alone—if they'd only left me alone, shaking their heads over you, Annette, my Annette, shaking their heads over you and telling me to be firm with you, as though I'd married some kind of little scheming whore, instead of what you are."

Annette burst into tears and implored him to be quiet.

"They've nothing else to do. They've nothing else to do," she said. "They're jealous. That's how women are. There isn't a woman in the world who wouldn't give her eyes to have been to you what I have been. We've said good-bye to money. You can't have both in this world. We said good-bye to it when we were young. Serge came to stay with us. He's very like your father. Perhaps they had something to do with it. Serge and that old man. He came in full of the sun and the smell of wild places far away. But does it matter how it happened?—Are you sure the children are asleep?"

Bennett went out on to the landing and listened.

"Yes. There's no sound."

"Stephen would be awake if he were here," she said oddly and Bennett looked puzzled.

"I think I know the way," she said. "There's always a way out. Someone is soft in the wall of hardness. There's always someone who can't bear to see injustice done though all the rest will say—'It is the

Law,' and go on saying it until they're dead and have forgotten how they killed the living child in beauty's womb."

She was certainly odd. She was talking in a clear, low thrilling voice and was in a kind of trance.

"Annette!" he called. "Annette!"

But she was beyond words, thinking, feeling with a clear power that uplifted her and made her like the Virgin, come down in answer to her own act of prayer.

In awe Bennett waited, his mind groping back through his tortured thoughts and repeating—

"Suffer little children to come unto Me, for of such is the Kingdom of Heaven."

Aunt Maggie's text hung over the bed and alongside it was a sketch by Miss Lawrie of a gipsy encampment on top of a mountain with dark rain clouds hanging low, and a twisted tree, bending to the storm.

"Are you sure the children are asleep?" asked Annette.

"Are you sure? I thought I heard Stephen moaning."

"Stephen is in Roman Street," said Bennett.

"I don't see how he's ever going to live," muttered Annette. That was her formula for Stephen; all the formula she had.

CHAPTER XI.

BROTHER AND SISTER.

WITH sure instinct Annette went to Jamie. Whatever the others might say of or do to him, he was the head of the family and this was a family affair. If there was anything to be done he would do it and he would understand as he had done from the beginning. Just because he was the head of the family and its presiding genius, he would not bully or affect a disastrous moral superiority. Above all he would see that Catherine kept her claws out of the trouble.

She arranged with Mrs. Wiltshire, next door, to keep an eye on the house and the children, borrowed a shilling for her tram-fares and set out for Roman Street, an hour away. Three hundred pounds! It was a fearful lot of money. Thirty pounds, which had to be procured immediately, looked like more than the whole shabby town could contain, and yet it had to be done, it had to be done. Bennett had left it too long. He could not stand any more. . . Why had he left it so long? But did it matter why? There was no earthly use in finding reasons for calamity. The only thing to do was to deal with it.

Annette had memories of gay parties in a house near Roman Street in the house to which the Clibran-Bells had moved from Fern Square, but the Clibran-Bells had gone. Mrs. Clibran-Bell, the sweetest, prettiest old lady, had inherited some money, and they were gone to live

in the country. The street had collapsed. The good old houses had *Apartments* printed over the fan-light. The Clibran-Bell's house was a laundry, and the house next door was a school of cookery. Everybody had gone. The old life had collapsed. Only these Lawries did not and could not or would not move.

She was afraid of being seen by Catherine spying out upon a menacing world through her fern-screened window and she made a detour past the house in which her poor brother Fred had lived. Poor Fred ! The most charming and the weakest creature that ever lived ! What hope was there for any one who was just charming and nothing else, and yet what dearer or more precious creatures were there in the world ? Fred could make you laugh and feel happy and all the women were just a little in love with him, just enough to make all the difference in their lives. He could make their eyes shine and their cheeks bloom just a little more so that someone would fall in love with them. Life was like that. It needed people like Fred if it were not to be dull and coarse and common. Annette tossed her head defiantly. She for one was not going to acquiesce in the slavish and irreligious destructiveness of the common people, even if they did take all the money away from the good old families, like the Folyats and the Needhams and the Boscawens. It was all that man Cromwell, and it was just like Thrigsby to put up a statue to that man with his warty face, though they had not dared to put him in the Town Hall Square but had had to hide him down by the station. You could always tell common people by their noses and the good they did wrought far more damage than the bad done by people like the Folyats, who, if they did run wild, only did so because it was becoming harder to make people happier.

So her thoughts ran, until she came to the back door of the stucco house. Her heart beat and she was afraid.

So much was at stake and everything would go wrong if she were to find Catherine in the kitchen. She crept to the scullery door, opened it noiselessly and stole in. She had to clutch at the sink to steady herself for she heard Catherine's vibrant tones giving orders, and, as usual, complaining, but she had not been heard and presently Catherine padded away to her throne-room. Annette scratched on the door and called to Tibby.

"Tibby! Tibby!"

"Eh? Who's yon?"

"It's me."

Tibby came shuffling into the scullery.

"Why, Mistress Bennett."

"I want to see Mr. Lawrie. I must see Mr. Lawrie."

"He's away."

"O! dear."

"Is it trouble?"

"O! It is. I can't tell you. I must see Mr. Lawrie."

"He should be at the News office, but I doubt he isn't

... Will I tell the mistress?"

"No, no, no."

"Hum!" Tibby grunted, appraising the situation. She knew what it had cost Annette to come creeping into that house where for years her name had been insulted. She was elated too that she asked for Mr. Lawrie.

"Bennett hasn't left you?"

"No, no, no. Don't ask me questions! Tell me where I can find Mr. Lawrie!"

"He'll be at Hepworth's, or—or the tobacconist's."

"What tobacconist?"

"I'll take you there."

Tibby locked the kitchen door to make sure there should be no interruption, put on her bonnet and shawl, and led Annette round to Miss Meekin's; where, sure enough, they found James Lawrie and Stephen playing Beggar-my-Neighbour in the parlour. Stephen slid off

his chair and ran to his mother,—his big head drooping to one side while he rocked on his feet.

Jamie stared in surprise at his little daughter-in-law and from her to Stephen. Tibby slipped away to her kitchen.

"The boy said you were coming. You're welcome. This is more my house than my own."

"Go into the shop, Stephen," said Annette.

"No," cried Jamie. "That boy's a better man than I am. He doesn't talk."

But Stephen trotted away. Obedience was the only communication he had with his mother.

"It's good to see you," said Jamie, "and if there's trouble all the better. One can be human when there's trouble. One can share it without jealousy. Who brought you here?"

"Tibby."

"You went to the house?"

"Yes. No one saw me. It's—I—we're in dreadful trouble. I didn't know, at least I did know, but not exactly. Bennett's in debt."

"At the office?"

"No. A Jew."

"Which?"

"Gordon."

"I know. His other names are Macdonald, Ferguson and Moses. What a damned fool!"

"Bennett isn't a fool. He believed in a man called Langdon."

"Another Jew?"

"No. A common man. A blacksmith."

"Well?"

"It's a lot of money. Three hundred pounds, and thirty must be paid next week. Interest."

Jamie smiled quizzically.

"Aye," he said, "that's a deal of money."

"It was only fifty when he borrowed it."

"What for?"

"He invented something and he was sure your sister was going to leave him——"

"And she left it to *his* sister . . . Well?"

"Well! . . . I've come to you."

"Do I look so rich?" He glared at her and forced her to take stock of him, his shabby green coat and frayed collar.

"I came to you because you've always been so good to me, the only one, and—and I let you have Stephen."

"Tell the truth, child. You don't miss him?"

"No . . . No. I'm on your side."

"I take no sides," rasped Jamie. "Understand that. The world, or this town, which is the world, has reduced us to the alternative, employ or be employed, and I choose neither. I'm not a thief. I'm not a slave. I go my way. I was alone for many, many years until that boy—— Why not let the Jew whistle for his money?"

"He'll take everything we have, and then ruin us."

"There's no harm in that. Bennett could play cards with us."

"I can't bear you to joke about it."

"No. People can't stand my jokes. They cut too deep."

"I wouldn't mind," said Annette. "I'd go through everything with him, only I'm——"

He looked at her face and nodded kindly.

"Quite right," he said. "It isn't a joke—for you, though it is for me. I've seen the richest men in this infernal town caught napping for a sum like that. We used to help each other out, but nowadays half a man's work is catching the other fellow on the nod. Break him, sell him, buy his business cheap . . . I'll find a way. Thirty pounds, you say?"

"Can you?"

"At the worst I can wring my daughter's neck and make her give the half she owes . . ."

"O! No," protested Annette, terribly afraid that he was not sane or sober enough to have understood how grim and serious the position was.

"I should enjoy it," said Jamie, chuckling over his own humour. "I hate my daughter as I hate all unloved, unloving women and that's a hundred and one out of a hundred. You're not a woman. You're a child. What a shame it is! What a shame! You two young things, though I don't know that anyone is old enough to live in this beastly world. Old and tough and hard you have to be and mean as dirt, and then even the Jews will be afraid of you and let you alone . . . I'll have to stir myself. I'll do my best. I haven't stirred myself for years. The result used to be too awful. Hah . . . Well, well, well, well. Don't look so frightened, child. The worst that can happen to a human being is not so terrible. Look at me! You've set your heart on paying up this Jew who's Jewing you. That's honourable, so they say, though it seems to me to make you an accessory to the theft . . . You can't think, heh? Too frightened to think?"

"I'm not afraid," said Annette, fretting over the time he was wasting in musing and mumbling.

"There's some money I've had put away for years. It's in my bed. Tell Tibby it's in my bed and that she's to give it you. Inside the ticking of my bed; there's forty pounds, or fifty, or a little more. It's mine. I made it, with the little there is left of my brains . . . You look better, heh? There won't be any smash for a month then? A month's a lifetime in a tight place. Who knows what mightn't happen? Another Aunt might die, or Tom, my brother Tom—though he won't die. He knows the Saints above won't be frightened by his frozen face . . . I'm shocking you? Before I die I hope to have the pleasure of saying exactly what I think of everybody . . .

But I'm hawering. You'll go to Tibby and tell her to give you that money, and you're to tell her that if she doesn't give it you I'll wring her neck, and that if it isn't there my wife has stolen it, and I'll wring her neck too. But it will be there. One pound a week she gets for keeping me alive, and that is what they'd give you for Bennett if he disgraced them too. I wish he would. I wish to God he would, the smug self-worshippers. I'm thinking, child. You mustn't think that because I'm hawering I'm not thinking. That never stops, that never, never stops—thank God. It has made me wondrous happy that you should have come to me, but you know, and I know that that boy is mine. He'll never turn against me though they'll lie about me as long as I am remembered, and say that I was a hawerer and a play-actor that had to steal the gaping admiration from the minds of children."

He clenched his fists and glared fiercely at Annette.

"Is that true? They do say that."

"Yes. They say that."

"The liars. The smug liars. Ask Tibby, ask the woman of this shop, ask the men who drink with me."

"I know it is not true," said Annette. "I came to you because it is not true."

Jamie stood up, straightened himself, buttoned his coat across his chest, and said:

"A man can only be honoured in dishonour among such people. Give me your hand and promise me that however much, when he is a man, you may be bewildered by that boy, you will say to yourself: James Lawrie taught him not to be afraid. And don't pretend to have a broken heart when he starts making life, making life, making life."

He was very intent and icily fierce. Annette's clear grey eyes smiled up at him. She did not in the least understand what he was talking about, but she felt that it was vitally important to him.

"Well, well," he said, "there's something decent left in you at all events, in you and that queer brother of yours, the painter-fellow. He has not much of a mind, but such as it is he knows it. The rest have only pockets . . . Here : I'll give you a note for Tibby. Bring me ten pounds here. I'll need it for the journey. The rest you can take to Bennett. Does he know you've come to me ? "

"Not yet."

"Don't let him know. He thinks he'd be a kind of John the Baptist but for me. Let him go on thinking so. I'll settle it. This family is mine and has to carry out my will, and has done so and will do so while there are any of the name and while there is a drop of the strange knowing blood in man or woman. I'm grateful to you, child."

He wrote her a note and gave it her, and off she ran to Tibby in her kitchen. Tibby read the note, shuffled away upstairs, and came down presently with a bag of sovereigns and silver.

"How did you guess that he had money ? " Tibby asked Annette.

"I didn't," said Annette.

"When is he going ? He says he's going. He's too ill and old."

"I don't think he's either ill or old," snapped Annette, "and I don't think he would be where he is if only someone would give him something to eat and look after his clothes."

"Losh ! " said Tibby.

"Yes, indeed," said Annette. "And if Mrs. Lawrie were here I'd say the same to her."

"And that I wish you would," replied Tibby.

Annette flew back to the shop, gave Jamie the ten pounds, and she and Stephen took him to the station and saw him off by the train to Windermere.

Stephen stood watching the train move out. He loved

trains and engines, but the idea of Jamie going hurt him ; for his idea of his grandfather was of something eternal, something that did not need to move, but was all-knowing and all-powerful, and all-loving. The idea of his moving in a train like anyone else made him angry, and he was not to be mollified even when Annette took him to Cheshire's grand teashop in St. Mary's Square and gave him a gorgeous tea of crumpets and Simnel cake, with almonds in the icing and a layer of almond in the middle of the cake.

"I used to come here before I was married," said Annette.

That seemed to Stephen so long ago as to be hardly worth mentioning. He looked sceptically at his mother, and did not at all approve of her. She had done or said something which had made Jamie go away.

"Where's he gone ?" he asked at length.

"I think he's gone to Miss Lawrie's."

"Is it far ?"

"Yes. A long way. Almost as far as Scotland."

"That's not far. He lives there all the time. It is only on the other side of the wall at the end of the garden, and sometimes you can see the manse through the wall."

"O ! That's only his way of talking."

Stephen looked at his mother with even greater disapproval. She had understood nothing at all ; but then, she was only English ! If Jamie said a thing it was so, if he said a thing it was so ; and this indulgent tone that Annette saw fit to adopt was abominable, worse than flat contradiction, or even her annoying habit of being with him far more a child than he was himself. O yes ! The anger, the smouldering fury, the deep oppression of the stucco house were far better than anything to be found outside it ! There things could break into splendour, while everything else just went on and on, as though people had faces and nothing else. Words came out of

their faces and food went into them, and that was all. . . . However, Stephen remembered that he had promised to be good to his mother, and he felt rather mean to be thinking of her like that, or to be thinking of her at all.

It was years since Jamie had left Thrigsby. Ever since his return from America, or even before that, since he had stood at the graveside of his mother, he had been at grips with his enemy, the subtle, unresting foe who could take a thousand shapes to lure him, since there was no defeating him, into surrender and acceptance of the travesty of life which was called commercial success and then Imperialism and then domestic happiness, and then security, and then big business, and then patriotism: a limitation, a cramping, a compression of existence until men were sore and stupid and women were bitter and hysterical. No matter what loneliness, what misunderstanding, what contempt and self-contempt it might entail, he could not acquiesce.

Besides, there was the bloody glory of the fight! His home-life had been wrecked, his business shattered; there were times when his mind was almost gutted, but while there was life in him he would fight on. Sooner or later, sooner or later, he would no longer be alone. He would kindle a will to live that would force life out of the enemy's grasp and set it thrilling and throbbing again with music and laughter and the glee of simple love given to simple things . . . Long, long ago, he had said good-bye to the appearance of things. The enemy had plunged underground. It was a matter of mining and counter-mining.

Proof of the thing was contained for him in the mania for respectability that was all these English knew and cared to know. Their one aim seemed to be to conceal the horror of their lives from themselves; while his desire was to face that horror and to overcome it. They admitted their defeat in advance. He would die rather than acknowledge it, but astonishingly he did not die.

There was not a soul in the world that did not wish him dead, for the nuisance that he was; but though he staggered and collapsed, though he suffered night and day until it seemed that blood must be streaming from his eyes, he gained in force and vision, seeing clearly every phase of the conflict, growing in leaping certainty that the victory would somehow be his, though when it came he might be rotting in his obscure grave.

There were times when, for his purposes, he had no need of his physical life. Whiskey could put an end to that for the time being, blot it out for a day and a night. The enemy would be deceived into thinking that was the end of him, while the mind of him could find peace and power and silence. It was convenient to be a thing not worth throwing on the midden. No one bothered him. He could choose his own associates, and have none forced upon him.

His position became agonisingly clear to him as he left Thrigsby, the stronghold and seat of the enemy: where the foolery of politics was kept alive so that greedy knaves could gorge themselves with money and the lives of the many who had gone to the making of it—for money is life; let there be no mistake about that!

He thought of himself as a boy journeying down from Scotland by the coach to take his share of the great life—the great life, created by his forbears, and it pleased him to see how clean the line of his life was, unbroken and uninterrupted, how it had held its force until there had been found for it a passion that could contain it, a love that broke all bounds and embraced everything in all creation—his love for the boy, Stephen, that asked nothing only to make the beloved abound in loveliness and grace. Only that could defeat the enemy!

But it had come so late, that love. If only he could have twenty more years of it, not to protect the boy. God! How should love need protection? But to teach

him to fight, to save him from waste of effort, to show him how to avoid hurting those who were not strong enough to be hurt, since that only could be fatal to him.

"Aye," he said to himself, "they have had their way with me. I have given them their way. And what then? They're done and down and finished, and I am still and always at the beginning."

Well, there was this new way of travelling that made the fields and the hills look silly because there was no time to look at them. In a tight place it was convenient to be able to do three days' journey in six hours, but the rascals who had got you in a tight place could move as quickly.

There was nothing in speed, though the fools thought there was, and lay back on their sofas and left everything to speed. It only meant that if there was a smash the danger was all the greater. Still, if people liked it so, they liked it so, and there was an end of it. There was this advantage that with the fools all lulled to sleep, the enemy came out into the open, thinking there was none to stay him. That was all.

The fields and the hills might look silly, but, thought Jamie, not nearly so silly as the men and women travelling with him with never a word to say to each other, never a smile, never a shiver or a stir of interest; blank faces staring now out of the window, now at the luggage on the rack, seeing nothing at all, numbed by this travelling that they thought so great a thing and for which they had sacrificed that other travelling through each other's eyes into a world of memory and knowledge where fields were alive with force and fruitfulness and hills in wisdom folded all life in their embrace, and stood in noble majesty, their ruggedness alone strong enough to stand against the awful wonder of the heavens. . . .

The hills, thought Jamie, make the fight too easy. Better the foolish squalor of the sprawling town. There, with all the mischief he has done, a man can fight without

the weakness of illusions or the breathlessness of solitude. Aye, the feebler and more wretched in these times, the better.

He found it comforting to see stone houses again. The English in their towns of dirty brick had lost the bleak delight of form. They had huddled into a comfortable darkness. They——. But that was a bad habit of his to be talking about “They.” They ruled the waves and had let loose this monstrous speed, which they worshipped, upon the world. Well, let them sleep until they were awakened. It was none of his business. He could not share their enthusiasm for slumber at a hundred miles an hour. He, for his business, needed to be awake, and he was so, though his vigilance and the beauty of his spirit were concealed in rags and misery—the better to look out upon the world.

Crushed, numbed and blinded by the weight of their preposterous respectability, men like his brother Tom found the slums and the people in them too horrible and pretended that they did not exist, just as, so far as possible, they ignored Jamie’s continued cumbering of the earth, though there was no escaping his delight to be a clog upon their satisfaction. He roared with laughter as he thought of them pretending of him who had gone so far ahead that he had been left behind. They did not know—how could they, who lived incarcerated in themselves?—that he had a new life in Stephen and was reaching forward in the boy’s life to the time when the crash came and all that he had suffered to preserve should be let loose so quietly that no one would be aware of it and yet all should feel in themselves a new peace and a new dignity.

“We’ll beat them yet,” he said, as often he had said to Stephen after long scrutiny and deep searching into his eyes and tender fingering of his brow and chin and cheeks.

As the train left Preston, leaving the industrial belt behind and the pure soft light came streaming through the

salt-laden air he felt with a sudden bound of confidence that he and Stephen had beaten them, and in their close love had created a power that no matter what happened, would find its form. Stephen, himself, and the sunlight over the sea, were quite enough. If there were but one love in the world that could not be dragged into the vulgar destructive confusion it must end in joy and salvation, though the way might, nay must, be through blood and agony; for it was impossible that these thousands and thousands of human beings should stay in the slums: but whither could they go? Only out into the earth in a wild plunge after a more decent savagery. . . . But he had done with visions. He had very few years of life before him, and those must be for Stephen.

"Hah!" He drew a deep breath as the train brought him within sight of the mountains, the stupid, cramping, lonely mountains that with their mists and their subtle, magical response to the light filled men like himself with an intolerable beauty that drew them out to seek the like in men and women, huddled together, poisoned with each other's breath, frozen with their timid travesty of love. Jamie smiled wanly as he thought of the grim humour of his own marriage.

"Married? Aye, married on the Iron Maiden."

How men and women clung to the torture and self-torture of the Middle Ages! That was a good image for the married women of these days, the Iron Maiden, into which a man was thrust to be slowly spiked to death. . . . What book was that in? O! Yes, "The Tower of London." A fine literature for these people! Ainsworth smugly keeping alive the fag-end of the mediæval mind and Dickens with his pity for the dwellers in the slums. But pity is death, pity is death, and the song that should be in the hearts of these people was done to death by pity.

And this sister of his that he was going towards, a

shrewd, saving, canny little body, whom he knew so well in letters, and hardly at all in the surface detail of her life. She had been out of it all. She was somehow fumigated and anti-septic, proof by knowledge of other races against the poisoned life of these islands where success had become so pompous as to be more bitter than the most ludicrous failure. She had gone back to the mountains—admitting failure? Going as far as she dared towards Scotland, and the beauty and the struggle of their childhood that had laid on them so immense, so immense a responsibility, the maintenance of the Lawrieian principle. Jamie never judged anybody, even when they judged themselves by presenting an invariable aspect to the world.

He had never borrowed money in his life. He was not going to borrow it now. He was going to claim it—for Stephen, for that was how the situation presented itself to him. It touched his love. Annette and Bennett were necessary to Stephen, therefore they must be protected and saved from the consequences of their own innocence and folly, which there was no condemning since they came from their absorption in their love. Jamie understood that. He had been with them through their first dark year, though they did not need him, but when Stephen was born, the strange, luminous child who had needed him so profoundly, he had forgotten about them. Their love had been fulfilled—it did not much matter what happened to them. They had done enough. They might dwindle away into respectability. . . . Good Lord! If money was not to protect love, what was it for? He was going to claim this money for love, but all the same he wondered how far a spinster could go in understanding that. Must there not in a life of neither great grief nor great joy be a smouldering jealousy, a vain clutching at any opportunity of power that was presented?

Old Tom was like that, poor wretch. If he were asked for money he would with-hold it just to make you and himself feel that he had the whip hand, while if he were not asked he might produce the money to make you feel it just the same, or to ensure that another opportunity should arise. Old Tom had one observation when difficulty arose. He would jingle the half-crowns in his pocket—he liked half-crowns and preferred eight of them to a sovereign—and say :

“ On these occasions I always find that people never tell the truth about themselves.”

That ended it as far as he was concerned. A man who wants to borrow money must be made to wince and to understand the disgrace of the publication of his poverty ! None of this nonsense (for Tom) of “ a man’s a man for a’ that ” ; a man’s a man if he can pay his way. Otherwise he is a subject for the Poor Law. Tom’s rigidity was only tempered by the extension of his principle to the family, which also must pay its way. Jamie, the head of the family, had criminally ignored that principle. He and his must be made to feel their wickedness.

Now Miss Lawrie frequently stayed with Tom and apparently was on good terms with him, though she suffered, like everyone else, from his scathing tongue, whose withering sarcasms were famous in Thrigsby and had usefully collapsed more than one bubble of municipal folly. The question before Jamie was how far was his sister infected with Tom’s principles ? Would the mere mention of money inflame them ?

This remained to be seen. Meanwhile there was the journey to enjoy ; the sea at Morecambe Bay, and the mountains piling themselves up above the train.

“ Hah ! ”

That was a good mountain above Kendal, and how fine it was to feel at Windermere that the train went no

further. These rails that had cut through the soul of England stopped short at the mountains where there was nothing that townsfolk needed save beauty. Hah! One shook off the noise and the clatter and the ugly bitterness induced by the friction of the crowd. There was nothing here but a few sheep and lonely villages where men and women lived meagrely as they had lived in Scotland, meagrely in the flesh, wildly in the spirit.

Miss Lawrie's house was twelve miles from the station. Ten miles could be done by the coach that stood waiting for the mails and the newspapers (what need is there of newspapers when you can read the mountains?). The driver and the guard wore red coats and white top hats and they looked askance at the shabby old man, and took him for one of the starveling parsons of the valleys who had managed, God knows how, to make an excursion into the outer world.

"Easedale, sir? Get off at the Rothay, Grasmere."

"Ah! Wordsworth," said Jamie.

"Yes, sir. Wordsworth's grave and ginger bread and sports. I didn't take you for a stranger, sir."

"I'm from the mountains, over in Galloway."

"I'm from Penrith myself," said the guard.

The driver looked round, cracked his whip, the horses swayed this way and that as they tugged at the traces. The coach swung into motion, grinding against the brake as they edged their way down the steep hill to the lake. There was only one other passenger, a lady who sat inside, for it was very cold. Jamie turned up his green and greasy collar and the guard put a rug round him. There was snow on the fells and the dark clouds held their rain and let the sun play painter with the lakes and hills. A steam boat chugging along the lake sent the waves of its wake lapping over the pebbles. . . Jamie felt a little despondent. This place also was tamed and exploited. It was not like Scotland, not like the Glen

Kens. It was familiar, too familiar, too domestic—impossible to see the mountains without thinking of Wordsworth and Coleridge, but the names on the signposts were good and strong, poems in themselves and he asked the guard to name some of the mountains, Loughrigg, and Silver How and Butter Crag. Yes. There must have been good mountain men here, but the place was tame, trim and on show—villas, boarding-houses, hotels at every corner with a “view.”

“That’s considered the best view,” said the guard. “Langdale Pikes from ’ere.”

“I prefer my own back yard,” said Jamie, who all his life had refused to see what he had been asked to see.

“My own tastes is ’omey,” said the guard. “Wordsworth’s all right, I suppose, but ’e’s been dead a long time.”

“Poor Peter Bell!” said Jamie.

How entirely the past was dead! He was shocked to find that his clear memory of this place was cold and without interest for him, though here he had hovered on the brink of love. All life was that, perhaps, each passion, though it seemed so complete in itself, but a figment, a foretaste of what was to come. Agnes, Agnes of the Lake, the figure that he had seen in such shining purity, almost as Blake had seen the women of his visions, and she was now only his brother’s pretty, tired, disappointed and automatic wife, kind and sweet, too sweet, swallowed up in Tom’s grim egoism. Ah! That had hurt! But the hurt was forgotten. The fruit of that passion had been his sustenance until another came, so prolific that there was no keeping pace with it, rousing passions, good and bad, on every side, so that his life had become a storm, to break at last, in old age, when surely there should be peace, into the consummation of all his loves and joys and griefs. . . . “I’ve lived,” he thought. “My God, I’ve lived and given more, a damned

sight more, than I have taken. Aye, this world owes me more than the Jew's money which is all I ask of it. I'd cut my tongue out rather than ask for more, or let Stephen ask for more through me. He will begin where I leave off, and he too will live, by God he will. There'll be no need for him to hide away. He'll be at peace, with quiet ease and dignity and neither rich nor poor, but just a man like me or you or any of us beneath the pompous masks we wear—rich man, poor man, drunkard. . . ”

The guard looked strangely at the muttering old man, and thinking the cold was too much for him, offered him a drink when the coach drew up at Ambleside.

“No thanks,” said Jamie, “no thanks. I've drunk enough with dreams and memories.”

“You're a queer one and no mistake.”

“My name,” said Jamie, “is James Lawrie. I used to stay here years ago, but all my friends are dead or far away.”

More passengers boarded the coach. He rather resented their breaking in on his solitude, but did not notice the disdainful glances that were cast at him. He was used to that. They could see his shabbiness, but not his love. So much the worse for them.

The coach swung along past Wordsworth's Seat and Rydal and up the long slope towards the rocky corner above green Grasmere Lake. Jamie smiled at the tender absurdity of the place. The drive would soon be over, and with it the musing thoughts that had mingled with the crunching of the wheels and the clopping of the horses' hoofs. . . His sister had travelled. Had she? Had she travelled as far as he who had stayed still in the imprisonment of his marriage? What travelling was there save that which wakened thought? Aye, a journey was good for a rest or to weave new tunes with thought, but in itself had no power to change a man. What he

was must remain the same. He was only his passions and the good or ill luck that befel him as they drove. . .

Here at a cold long last was the church by the Rothay which he entered last with Agnes of the Lake at a Rush-bearing when little girls in white decorated with stags' horn moss brought rushes to the church and strewed them on the floor.

Our Fathers in the House of God
The fragrant rushes strewed. . . .

That was how the hymn went and people had turned to see the handsome couple. Well, well, that was long ago, and it was years since he had taken any interest in external beauty or given any thought to his own appearance. No one but Stephen had ever really recognised him. One woman had languished towards him because he had been handsome, and one had married him because he had been rich, or thought to be so. . . Well, well, these English, they Anglicised everyone into insensibility and men and women became husbands and wives, husbands and wives and forgot that they were ever lovers in the toil of keeping up appearances.

He descended from the coach, looked shyly round and asked at the hotel for the direction of his sister's house—straight on, up the hill, almost as far as you could go, the last house but one before the waterfall.

The strange passion that had possessed him and had carried him thus far deserted him suddenly, and, coming to a stone bridge over a river, he sat down on the parapet and laughed at himself for having come. What did it matter if a Jew had to do without his money? Bennett's poor little house-full of furniture would be sold up. That would be all. . . Tom and John might intervene. They might take Stephen away from him as they had taken everything else, once they had found that he had no means of protecting himself. Yes, that was why he

had come, aching with the pain of leaving his prison, to fight for his last consummate love. Thieves, all of them, rich and poor alike, saying—"Look, the proud man is in love, he cannot see us, let us take everything that he has." Huh! Let them. That was what they lived for, the excitement of robbery and destruction; and invariably to fall in love was to fall among thieves.

That was what had happened to Bennett, and, plucked as he was already by his mother's jealousy, he would be broken by it, and live in a kind of patched-up shame, shrivelled, like this petty world of commerce, into waiting for old men to die. But Jamie and Stephen had found the way through it all, and on they would go hand in hand though no one else followed them. . . What a shame! What a shame! Annette would have to stay behind, though she would dearly have loved to have followed them. Hand in hand, the old man and the child, brave in their love and the power it gave them to see men and women for the shining marvels that they are and not for the pinched puppets they would have themselves be thought.

Jamie came at last to the little wooden fence outside Miss Lawrie's house, neat and sweet and clean—not a weed in the pebbled path, not a fold awry in the curtains in the shining windows. He was greatly comforted. There was no pretention in Miss Lawrie's house. She had enough and no more.

There came down the road a little old lady in a black bonnet, with a veil over her face, and a thin black cape over her bowed shoulders. She walked with a smooth briskness as though her thoughts were easy and deep enough to swing her along for ever. She stopped short when she saw the vivid, romantic figure of her brother leaning on the fence. There was no mistaking him—age could not alter the splendid face that he had—rather only force it into sight, where there *is* sight. . . She

came to him and stood smiling up at him, and he grew the taller for the pleasure in her eyes, thrust his hat back, scratched his head and said, laughing :

“ You weren’t expecting a distinguished visitor.”

Her eyes travelled ruefully from his face to his frayed collar and woefully shabby clothes and she said :

“ Where’s your luggage ? ”

He threw up his hands and said :

“ I never thought of luggage, and if I had I should have had none.”

“ Why not ? ”

“ Who’d lend me a trunk or a shirt ? ”

“ Does *no* one look after you ? ” she asked in angry alarm.

“ I’m fed and housed and given cast-off clothes.”

“ No overcoat ? You must be perished.”

Now that he thought of it, he was very cold, and he followed her into the house where she bade her little maid mix him a whisky-toddy. There were some male clothes in the house left by one of her nephews and she insisted on his putting on a thick flannel shirt.

“ What a wife you would have made ! ” he said.

“ What a husband you should have been,” was her soft reply which made him sit up gaping at her. She added :

“ A hot bath and your feet in mustard and hot water is what you want. It is enough to kill you. The outside of the coach, was it ? ”

“ The outside of the coach.”

She shook her head :

“ I shall not be able to defend your sanity after this. . . But I’m glad you’ve come. I wanted you to see my house, but I never thought you could be dug out of your own.”

“ Annette did that.”

“ I have a great admiration for Annette.”

“ You’re snug in your own house.”

She took him downstairs again to the parlour where he fingered the books, German, French, Italian, and laughed gaily at the statue of the naked woman, who presided like a muse of spinsterhood over the chaste and learned neatness of the place.

"Well, well," he said, "month in and month out with nothing but the waterfall to talk to you."

"I have my books, my letters and my thoughts and plans to make for everyone I love."

"O! Ho!"

"There must be few less lonely women in the world. My friends wear well."

"Have you tried them?"

"No. Why should I?"

"True. Why should you?" said Jamie, drawing up his chair to the meagre fire in the grate, taking his foul clay pipe out of one pocket and reaching for his screw of tobacco in the other.

"I don't allow even you to smoke in the house," she said gently. "It is a rule and everyone obeys it. How are Robin and Mark and Phoebe?"

"Well."

"And Catherine?"

"Well, or ill. She is well when she is ill."

"No worse?"

"There cannot be worse than the worst. I've found my happiness as a grandfather, my dear."

"You have had to wait a long time then."

"O! I can wait for ever for the thing I want."

"And that is?"

"Content."

She shook her head kindly as though she did not understand, and, in spite of herself, must disapprove.

"You should have let me know that you were coming."

"I did not know myself until this morning. Almost

indecent, isn't it, according to the modern mind, to be so unpredictable."

"A certain regularity is expected. Yes. Of work, for instance."

"I work all day and every day, and every night."

"At what?"

"My grandson."

He laughed aloud at her incredulity, and she decided not to take him seriously, though she felt that he had meant it in all solemnity. He shook his finger at her and said:

"Now, now, the situation is too serious for nonsense. There is a Jamie myth, and there is Jamie. Which are you talking to? For if you insist on talking to the myth I shall take my hat and go to the hotel."

"Why did you make it?" she asked.

"The myth? I didn't. Vulgar minds must vulgarly account for the unaccountable."

"You have set too much store by yourself."

"None. None."

Again she looked puzzled and she said:

"I wish you could have gone to London."

"No. No. Thrigsby was my mark and I have hit it. A bull's eye. But no one for thirty years will understand. When Stephen is a man and knows how life and mind and thought have changed, he will understand, and he will be able to act where I have been able only to endure."

"I think you are a kind of an artist," she said.

"Why define? I am a kind of a human being. What do you want more than that?"

"O! Jamie don't. It hurts me that you should be——"

"What?" he snapped.

"When you were young I was so proud of you."

"And now you are ashamed?"

"No. Sick and sad at heart."

He stretched out his hands towards the fire and replied :

"You should be wise at your age. There are the young to think of. Do you want them to be more helpless in the world than we have been, to find no life, to collapse of disappointment in their middle years ? . . . No, no, no. We two are old. We have won through to some possession of ourselves and there could be nothing more ignoble than to count the cost. If I had wanted applause I could have had it ; money, I could have had it—a lying domestic felicity, I could have had it. I will have things true and full, or not at all. If all that I could have on those terms was misery—very well then, I would have misery. I will not move. I will not act—I never have been able to do so, where my affections are not engaged, though never so slightly. . . But why explain ? The more I explain, the less you will understand."

"I only know that you are, as you have always been, my brother, and that somehow you are more than any other man I have ever met."

"Aye." Jamie gave a sigh of satisfaction. It was long since he had been able to talk so freely to anyone. "I've had my back against a closing door. They've never shut it yet and never will. I've jammed it. . . . There, there, you'd never understand if I talked till Doomsday. Tom knows somehow that all his virtue is wasted because of me, and you know that somehow, because of me, your life is full of something more than sentimental memories, and both of you are angry because there is nothing to show you what it is that I have done or what I am—except an empty bottle, and an empty house and a litter of grand-children who have to be provided for."

"Well ?"

She had brought her chair by the fire and sat by his side. She put out her hand and stroked his until he held her wrist and bade her be still. The strength of his

grip made her curiously happy, with a happiness different from any of which she dreamed and sweeter.

"It doesn't seem to matter that we are old."

"Why should it?"

"I understood that long ago, Jamie, when I was in love once, and was not loved."

"O!" he grunted. "Burn!"

"Yes," she said.

"You built this house for him?"

"How did you know?"

"It peeped out of all your letters when you were building it."

"You never said so."

"I respect those things too much. It was your affair and none of mine."

"I made it yours, Jamie, all the time, because I wrote and told you all that I could not tell him."

"So your letters to me were love-letters?"

"After Edinburgh, yes."

"Good for you. What other letters should there be?"

"I wanted them to help you."

"They did—to do what I had to do, aye, even to burning my house down."

"That I don't understand."

"Then you don't know the fire in my brain. . . . O! God, yes, there have been times when I would have quenched it if I could. You can slake the fires of Hell with strong drink, but the fires of Heaven nothing can put out."

"You should have been——"

He cut her short:

"I have been what I have been—a failure crying after every sleek successful humbug—there but for the grace of God, go I!"

"You're warmer now?"

"Aye, warmer now and comforted. How simple it

is. Just the touch of your hand. All I ask, all I need. Is that so very terrifying."

"Is she terrified of you?"

"Catherine? Yes."

"There is no rebuke so profound as simplicity. You should have left her. You should never have come back from America. You were happy there—a new country."

"Full of people hungry for the old. There were the children and their children——"

"They must live their lives."

"We have to bridge the failure of our generation and the collapse of the next."

"Has it come to that?"

"It is coming. They will do nothing—nothing at all. O! they can eat and sleep and maintain their conventions, but that is not enough. So can a blind plant make its stalk and leaves and roots, with never a flower."

Miss Lawrie began to catch a glimmering of his meaning and to feel ashamed not to have known clearly that he had brought his world crashing about himself to be free of it, not to evade responsibility but to meet it. She should have known that as she had felt it, and she should have defended him, if not against the subtle creeping hostility with which he was surrounded, at any rate against the tongues that assailed him in his family.

"You've your own boys?" she asked.

"They are against me."

"And Phoebe?"

"Against me."

"Bennett?"

"Against me too, but for his wife, who is a child, and trusts me like a child."

Miss Lawrie nodded. The sweetness of her life came from long years of association with children.

"I like that girl," she said. "She has no fear at all, and we need not be afraid for her children."

"She has a genius," said Jamie, "for knowing what can be done and what can't. The rarest genius in the world, I often think. She came to me this morning to ask me for three hundreds pounds. Which is surely proof of genius."

CHAPTER XII

MEN AND MOUNTAINS

HE left it at that for the night, deeming that he had given his sister quite enough to think over.

She gave him the second guest-room and a night-shirt of her nephew's, who would have withered with horror at the idea of its being worn by his disreputable uncle, for he had been to a public school and had learned the importance of unimpeachable relations. When you say "My people," you must mean it and have no lurking scarecrows in your mind, and the family imagination had made of Jamie a scarecrow before which all Thrigsby wilted away, ignoring the fact that there were several hundred people in the town who were very fond of him, proud of and grateful to him. If he had a shilling he would give it away, and the reason why he had no overcoat was that Catherine had refused to buy him another after he had given his to a wretched man who had to walk to Liverpool to look for work. Catherine, dominated by the family imagination, chose to pretend that he had pawned it and deserved punishment. It was horrible to her that when her sons were grown-up her husband showed no signs of being so.

Jamie enjoyed the fragrance of the room after the bare squalor in which he was condemned to live at home. He lay back in the clean linen sheets and whistled softly to himself and thought of bluebells in a wood with a hazy happy satisfaction. Heigho ! The world is not so tragic

after all. Obstinacy does not go so very deep, nor folly either, not deep enough to check the free movement of the living soul, which rejected all save the few rare vivid moments when obstinacy and folly were forgotten.

All his life Jamie had lived what his father had preached and had found at last that it was possible to hold and to release the beauty of such moments with a child whose love increased both his joy in this consummate confirmation and his misery at the blindness to it of those dear to him if only through their presence under the same roof.

He was inclined a little to envy his sister her fragrant loneliness, and the ease of her life built up on friendship without contact or responsibility, but he was too deeply interested in others ever really to be possessed by envy. This house of hers was an achievement. It had its importance to that on which he was so passionately intent, the dedication of Stephen and his love for Stephen to the task that he had so blindly grasped and so grotesquely (in his quarrel with circumstances) laboured to carry out. Heigho! Mary Lawrie was an odd little soul, and it was good that she had escaped from England and its solemn life of conflict to a sort of freedom and a shrewdly governed independence. . . . Sleep . . . Sleep . . .

At breakfast he sat in front of the painted portrait of himself as a young man, to Miss Lawrie's distress as she looked from one to the other, what he had been, and what he had become. It was not his battered shabbiness that hurt her so much as the antic element in him, so painfully in contrast with the drawn agony in his face and the stoop of his thin shoulders, which made her think that only some miracle enabled them to support the weight upon them. And then his preposterous youthfulness! It hurt her: so much vitality, such concentration and nothing to show for it, except this youthfulness that was displayed in every

gesture, in the gusto of his appetite, in the deep vigour of his voice. Neither in the young face nor the old could she detect weakness, only the gentleness of a splendid strength, and yet that was belied by all his history. But was it? That was the torturing puzzle of the man.

"Ah! Ah!" thought Miss Lawrie. "If only I had been his wife and not his sister."

That wife of his! That wife of his! She was at the bottom of it all. She would mistake his gentleness for weakness, and with her English obstinacy lash herself into the cold hysteria of moral indignation—about as far as the English would ever go towards passion. He would stand firm in his strength, she in her obstinacy, until the antic in him would see the wild humour of it all, take possession and dramatise the impasse to make it bearable.

"The larches are reddening," said Miss Lawrie. "Spring will soon be here."

"Then off you will go among your grantees."

"My friends," she corrected him gently.

"We call them your grantees," he chuckled. "We stay-at-homes who watch the apotheosis of the family in its one presentable member."

"Stay-at-homes?" said Miss Lawrie wistfully. "What a pity!"

"There is something to be said for taking root, and when I see what the South of England has done for John I am glad of the instinct that made me stay and fight it out in Thrigsby."

"Fight?" Miss Lawrie clutched hopefully at the word which might a little clear her mystification.

"Take this view of it," said Jamie. "These islands belong to the Celts, to you and me, with our long faces and strange long-sighted eyes, and half-a-dozen extra senses. They have been usurped by pirates whom we detest more for their stupidity than for their gross immorality. The fight is unending. We are pledged to it by our very

natures. Why else are you here instead of twittering at tea-parties in London ? ”

“ The habit of work is too strong for me,” replied Miss Lawrie, “ and I am translating Dante.”

“ You look like it,” he laughed. “ Well, well. Leave them alone, and they’ll come home, bringing their tales behind them. Them’s my sentiments, and I have always acted on them, which accounts for a good deal of my—er—success.”

His irony was too quiet and sharp for her. She wanted to pin him down, if not to reason, then at least to an aspect of their relationship which she wanted to be reassured was as fundamental to him as it had been to herself. That he had come to her in whatever trouble it was should have been enough, but woman-like, she wanted concrete and precise expression.

She smiled at him and then out at the squirrels in the ash-tree over against the fence.

“ If only you had remembered the importance of money and clothes,” she said, “ you might have been Prime Minister. The English must have a surface on everything.”

“ It is just that that we have to break.”

“ Then, in their eyes, you are a criminal.”

“ And in my own,” he said, “ and in my own.”

“ You certainly are shameless.”

“ An abandoned, hardened reprobate, come on an errand of mercy.”

She had lain awake, as he had imagined, over-night, turning over and over in her mind what terrible thing it might be that had brought him so suddenly out of his captivity, and had imagined such horrors (out of the grotesque terrors attributed to the stucco house by the family) that it came as a relief to her when he told her after breakfast that the trouble was only money.

She pondered that for some time and was a little anxious, for Tom Lawrie had always maintained that his

brother had no financial sense whatever, and that his troubles were due to that and to nothing else. Also it had become so congealed a habit with her not to spend money that the idea of parting with it hurt and frightened her.

"H—m, yes," she said, "H—m, yes," feeling that there must be more than that behind it or he would not have come all this way. Tom might be very disagreeable about it, but he would pay up rather than have more scandal and trouble, and Tom was only ten miles out of Thrigsby."

"It is vital," said Jamie. "Everything is involved, my whole life, Stephen, you, Tom, our mother, all the Lawries dead and gone.—Odd, isn't it?—Or perhaps you resent the implication that anything is involved in money but—money. People do, you know. . ."

"No," said Miss Lawrie, soberly. "I have been without money too often not to know how much is involved in it. I haven't gone to sleep in my retirement and I have often had a feeling that you would come to me as you have done. You were not my hero for nothing when I was a girl. I can't be proud of you, Jamie, but I can love you."

"It's a deal of money," he said. "Three hundred pounds—to be paid inside a month."

"Who knows about it?"

"Only Annette and myself. It is Bennett owes it."

"Bennett? But I thought he was never away from his wife except to go to church."

"He has allowed a Jew to pick both his brains and his pocket, though there was nothing much in either," said Jamie, pushing back his chair from the table, throwing out his long legs and pulling at his beard, while a quizzical expression crossed his face as he relished the humour of a man of his battered and wrecked appearance asking anywhere in the world for three hundred pounds. Threepence was more like it. For some time his sister had been talking more to his old portrait than to himself.

"He borrowed fifty pounds to make his fortune," Jamie explained further. "Security, Maggie's will. He didn't make a fortune, and he was not mentioned in Maggie's will. She was always spiteful after she burned her hair off. . . . Didn't she leave you a thousand?"

"Yes."

"Then you can leave Bennett what he wants before you die."

"It is in railway shares."

"You can borrow on them."

"I have never borrowed in my life."

"Nor I. But what else are banks for?"

"I don't understand banking, though I keep my money in a bank."

"I understand it well enough, though I don't approve of it. . . . I want the money for Bennett, or rather for Annette and Stephen. . . . I'd let them go smash only she is going to have a baby."

"What—another? Oh dear!"

"Yes. I think she enjoys it. She is lost without something helpless clinging to her. That is why she loves Bennett."

"O dear, O dear!"

"Nothing very terrible about that. The family has stuck its nose in the air and walked into the mire. We're old enough to enjoy the joke of it. Very well, then, we must pay for it. I *have* paid for it with my life. It is easier to write a cheque."

With true Lawrieian taciturnity she made no reply, and went away to the kitchen to go into the day's housekeeping with her little maid, who was in a state of alarm because the strange gentleman had eaten so much.

"The gentleman is my brother," explained Miss Lawrie.

"Oh! Ma'am!" The little maid's respect for her mistress was visibly diminished.

"Have you any brothers and sisters, Winnie?"

"Eight, ma'am."

"And how much money did your father have?"

"Twenty-two shillings a week, ma'am, and a turkey at Christmas."

Miss Lawrie muttered to herself as she had contracted a habit of doing in her solitude. Winnie went on talking and was sharply silenced, so sharply that she gave the fire a vicious poke and wondered what was "up." She was used to having her own way and most frequently it was the mistress who was snubbed in any dispute.

"I am going to the village," said Miss Lawrie.

"Yes, ma'am."

"My brother is going for a walk and will need some sandwiches and chocolate, which is very sustaining."

"Yes, ma'am."

Jamie had no thought of going for a walk, but he was in the habit of doing what he was told, the better to pursue his own unlawful habit of thought; and to-day, feeling young again, almost as young as his portrait, he fell in with Miss Lawrie's suggestion after his offer to accompany her had been declined.

"I prefer to be alone," she said. "You have given me a great deal to think over."

She was not quite honest with herself. She was much respected in the neighbourhood, liked the deference with which she was treated as a learned and travelled lady, and could not quite face the danger of meeting some of her distinguished friends in company with her lamentable but amazing brother. He felt that, but was undisturbed.

This adventure was turning into high holiday, a plunge with her back through his life to the glorious romance of their childhood in Scotland, which made everything that had filled his life to overflowing with misery breaking into joy and joy spilling over into misery seem theatrical and insubstantial. Ah! the clear knowledge of it, the sure delight, the vivid accurate imagination of youth, divining

infallibly the possibilities of life, only to be denied and mocked and battered into acquiescence in the maze of fraud in which youth and love are lost !

The babble of the beck called to him and, full though it was, he crossed it, leaping from stone to stone with sure skill, and turned his face towards the waterfall. Young again, a boy again, beginning life with Stephen, for whom he had so fiercely fought to preserve his own youth and love, than which there is no other gift worth the giving.

Bushes of heather, bushes of whinberry, red rotted bracken in the stony ground, wet and mossy, the place might pass for the valley of his boyhood, though it was without that bleak and splendid strength which sent his fellow-countrymen out into the world looking for an even harder test. They had not been beaten by their own soil ; what would the rest of the world do to them ?

That was the question : not what can I do, what can I get out of the world, but what can the world do, what can it get out of me ? Aye, that was the only attitude that could endure for a lifetime and beyond it, the only conception that would allow a man to be what he must be, a forerunner.

“ Great things are done when men and mountains meet. This is not done by jostling in the street. Heh ! Stephen, listen to the babble of the beck, listen to the roar and rush of the waterfall, the wind in the trees, sighing in the trees, whispering in the mountains ! Heh ! Boy, let the mists of this beauty drench your brain, soak into you so that you can never be rid of it, and every feeble thing will break upon it. Let this be your only comfort, for there is no other that does not eat away your heart and leave you rotten, supine, terrified. Heh ! There’s music here and magic that will break you into wonder upon wonder. Heh ! ”

It was to Jamie as though Stephen’s hand were really in his as he strode along, he and Stephen together eternally,

youth unbreakable and love that had withstood every test and rejected every temptation. . . .

Blake had achieved no more : nay, not so much with his old God reaching out over the abyss with his compass. What was a God, figment of a hungry mind, compared with an old man walking through the abyss hand-in-hand with the child of his love ? Heh ! boy, see how the abyss is illumined ; see how full it is of sights and shapes rejoicing at last to come to light ! They cannot reach us with their lies now, boy ; they cannot bind us with their pretences ! How easy life becomes when love joins hands, changing what must be changed, shaping what must be shaped, rejecting nothing, giving even falsehood room in which to perish, and to the human spirit the refining energy in which alone it can be at peace ! Well, well, well, and all their quarrels are done, and they are hiding in their houses until they are sure that we have passed through the abyss unharmed. . . . " I don't need to talk to you, Stephen, boy. I only need to hold your hand and kiss your eyes."

That was a good walk past the waterfall, up to the Tarn and Stickle Tarn and Pavey Ark—the huge lonely cliff that struck Jamie as being very like himself, weather-beaten and disreputable and to all seeming lonely, though high up here it must have the winds to talk to and the stars.

Lonely ! Good God ! What needs a man to be lonely when he has eyes in his head and a heart to feel ? What if excess of feeling does drive away men and women ? There are still trees and clouds and birds. Aye, there had been days and days before Stephen came when in the stucco house the brick wall at the end of the garden, with the light playing on it, had been company enough, almost too much.

There was always happiness in the world, too much it seemed for men and women who would have it that everything must happen according to their law and their

fantasy. There was nothing that this heavenly world could not yield if it were wooed aright ; no need that it could not satisfy, from the smallest and most precise, to the deepest and most bitterly ill-comprehended. O God ! what fools there were to think him poor and shameful, and to make him seem so . . . !

He stood presently upon the thimble-rock above Langdale, with the wind blowing from the sea through his beard and hair. The great lake of Windermere shone like a shield below him, and he stretched out his arms to take the world's beauty into himself and chanted words woven together by that other dirty and despised old man, Walt Whitman, whom he had sought out and known in America, where even more violently than in the parent Puritan Community, love and genius and the human spirit were denied—Poe and Melvill, wretched and forlorn ; Mark Twain a gilded buffoon ; Whitman crawling to an old dame's kitchen for his food. "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of them that bring glad tidings."

"Heh ! Stephen, here's a work to do, here's a way to find, here's a wilderness to plough, a jungle to be cleared, but nothing can be done until the iron of the soul is molten into steel."

Jamie had always been a little ironically suspicious of such outbursts. He had been concerned only to live deeply and with understanding, needed all his energy for that, and was a little jealous of any vent, but there was no waste here. He was giving Stephen what he needed, dedicating him to the work that in his time had been impossible, so huddled together had men and women been, so terrified in the loss of their prestige and leisure, so aghast at those who, without so much as thinking of it, preserved their dignity, and stood even as the mountains, unabashed under the sun ; William Blake, Walt Whitman, Robert Burns and Jamie Lawrie, who left nothing but a foul

memory and a small boy, for whom all his life he had endured in suppression even of his dearest gift

Ecstasy is out of fashion. What has it to show for itself? Nothing but its possessor's keen appreciation of the boon of living, than which there is nothing more fruitful, nothing more precious, nothing that more liberates the purpose of the soul.

"What did you find up there in the mountains, James Lawrie?"

"The achievement of my whole life-long passion to be and to know, and to pass my being and my knowledge on to young hands reaching out for it."

"Did you hate the world up there, James Lawrie?"

"I never hated the world, my dear. I loved it all from the foulest depths to the soaring wonder of love. I could never know the one without the other."

"Did you laugh at yourself up there, James Lawrie?"

"I did. I laughed at myself first and the rest last, the better to face their sour misunderstanding when they should know that I had been off again."

Impossible not to laugh—what else is there to do when life becomes real, brushes you aside for an incompetent and takes your affairs into its own hands? Jamie laughed until the hills rang with the echoes he aroused, and the sheep scampered away out of sight, out of sound of the hideous disturbance of this shambling animal that could not contain its joy, but must go roaring it through the silence and through the deep tranquil harmony of the day and the night. . . Here was this grand achievement in the hills, and down there in the dull smoke-poisoned lands the family was in a commotion over three hundred pounds that a Jew said was owing to him. . . . Ice-cold was the water in the tarn, ice-cold in the beck, and Jamie, drinking of it, gave a great happy gasp as he thought how he too was ice-cold with the fire of the soul within him, to which he had always committed, always

trusted himself for the strength that it could give to love and honour and the queer humour that he had, which for the practical purpose of getting the most out of life was more effective than either.

This was a grand day up in the hills, giving him at last what he had been seeking as a boy, when, seeking solitude, he had been unable to bear it for the longing for love and the aching ambition that withered him up and filled his head with foolish dreams of homage and much money and sweet, sweet hours with a beloved; foolish fantasies woven round the intolerable processes of life to make them seem important in themselves and fruitful of satisfaction—and they had yielded him all that they can ever yield, the capacity for solitude and the life that only begins when that is grasped, fulness and fertility, knowledge and desire begetting love, related to nothing and no one, absolute. . .

Ha! The water was good, and the air was good and the wind was good, but not so good as life down there in Thrigsby where the pressure of human tragedy was so intense that there was no escape, and there was nothing to be done but to sit still and to wait for old men and women to die. . . Stephen would escape; he had seen to that—but before Stephen, no one. The rest would just sit still, counting up the money with interest that the old men had made, for there was nothing else to be done, since there was no life for the mind in the claptrap, humbug and chicanery with which the flow of money was covered up.

“I’ve dodged them all,” thought Jamie. “I’ve dodged them all.”

He fell then to thinking of his marriage. That too was a success in its way. It was a good life in the stucco house for all its snarling and bitterness and grim comedy. Stephen thrived in it and perished away from it. That was proof enough, if proof were needed, that even there

he had had his way, dreaded though that way might be by the others who had taken his excess of love for violence and contempt. Bennett at least had been forced into adventure. What did it matter if he came to grief? . . . The rest shivered in their gentility, dreading the fierce heat of the slums. Mark with his church and his music, Robin with his ships. . . . Jamie shrugged—O! well, they had their dreams. And Phoebe? God help the women, for whom there was no place in this new scramble of a world, since there was no home, nor need of home and neither brewing nor baking, nor washing, nor weaving for them to do. They sighed for love, out of habit and expectation, but what were they to do with it when it came? Keep on moving, like Annette, in the vain search for a home and a position like her mother's as the centre of a family. She had energy, had Annette. Bennett, the lazy dog, need never make a decision or take a hand's turn, for Annette, what ever he might think, would have her way, and that way would not be Thrigsby's or Catherine's.

Jamie remembered with a shiver that he had come to these hills with an excellent paternal purpose, a practical errand. That he had established the logic of his doggedness was neither here nor there, though it might be intensely to his own satisfaction, a matter with which he had never been greatly concerned. What mattered was love and love could help Annette. What other use was there in love, than to help when help was needed? Annette had been so good to him in letting him hover round when Stephen was born, though she had no idea of the crazy passion that possessed him for this child, hanging over it, like some old wizard, while it lay asleep, glaring at its strange angelic face, fingering its brow above the eyes, holding his hands as though to protect it or to drink in through his fingers the luminous emanation that came from it. She had even said the child was

his and perhaps felt that in some strange way it was so.

The clouds came down over the hills and Jamie strode down through the moist cold air thinking whimsically of the walk he had taken with Tom in the early days of his disgrace long years ago when he had vainly dreamed that there might be a way of escape through art, artists and vagabonds. Ah! Good God, a sighing after pleasures that had been, a refusal to face what had been made of the world!

"Let them begin with me," laughed Jamie as he reached the waterfall and could look down on Miss Lawrie's house. "D'y'e see, Mary? Let them begin with me, for if there is a human image of Thrigsby it is I. Face me, and the rest is easy. . . But Stephen will see to that."

So strong was this conviction of his that Stephen would see to everything that he was often astonished that there could be any gloom left in the world. For him the great change had already come about. The curious reversal of the machinery of existence had run its course and it needed only the dramatic introduction of Stephen Lawrie at the right moment for everybody to desist from their mean sullenness and gaily to set about doing whatever they really wanted to do. . . "If only I could be there to see," Jamie used to say. "If only I could be there to see him in his glory. We're not afraid, Stephen, are we?"

On returning to his sister's house he found it a little complacent, as though she, too, was certain of having fulfilled her life. As though anyone could be certain! You may touch the centre of gravity of the soul every now and then, only to be sent spinning off into hideous, horrible, glorious, intoxicating uncertainty again. What kind of certainty was it then that had given this little woman, his sister, the energy all alone to journey through the world and all alone to build this house in which to store her memories?

He asked her.

At dinner that night she told him that in all her travels, and among all the learned and distinguished men she had lived and worked with, she had never known the equal of her memory of him.

"Only your memory of me?"

"You were very splendid, Jamie."

"Am I so awful now?"

"One would have liked you to have done something."

"To brag about. . . Well, you can say—'My brother is the grandest drunkard in all England.'"

"O! Jamie, no. That hurts."

"Then what of ranting, roaring Robbie?"

"There are his songs."

"I live mine."

He turned on her suddenly to see if she had understood him, but her thoughts were away. She was afraid of Tom and Catherine and all the fury of knotted jealousies that lay behind him. She asked him:

"If you had not married, would it have been any different?"

"No! That was an added burden to the load, but I was glad of it."

"What load?" She was puzzled, for she felt in her heart that he was the same simple direct man who had been her pride in all her wanderings.

"The load that shifted when Stephen was born."

This was unintelligible to her. How could a child take away the burden from a sinful man?

"It is so clear to me that I can make no one understand," he said. "What my mother willed to make of my father if he had lived. She never budged an inch on that. She was working on him in his grave and never forgave life for taking him. It was to carry the old spirit over into the new way of living, and not to live if doing so meant relinquishing the old spirit."

"I see," said Miss Lawrie, though she did not. She had always been at odds with her mother who had disapproved of her friendship with infidels and foreigners.

"You *don't* see," said Jamie cheerfully. "I've been a bridge between my mother and Stephen. Every man has his job. His loyalty is to that job and everything else must go to Hell if it must."

"I see."

"I wish you did. You'd not be sighing then over all the evil that has been said of me. I've had my job. I've stuck to it—a great deal has had to go to Hell, including most of myself. What's left has come to see you and to say good-bye."

"Why good-bye?" She was beginning to catch and to respond to his mood and the deep feeling in him, though it hurt her to realise how wide of the mark her thoughts of him had always been. She had thought him weak, but there was an overpowering strength in him helpless and vague, but he had been quick enough to act in the emergency that had driven him to see her—and he was shrewd, painfully without illusions, but perfectly free from cynicism—loving and understanding everything and everybody, except perhaps himself with whom he was not for a moment concerned.

"You would not have come to see me if it had been your own trouble."

"Good for you, Mary," said he. "I always let trouble have its way with me. . . ."

"You have always done that." Her eyes lit up with eagerness at the promise of a solvent of her pain concerning him.

"Why not let trouble have its way with other people then?" she asked.

He shook his head over that—"No, no, no. You'll never make sense of me, Mary, an old maid like you."

"I'm not so sure. You are certainly alive in your

old age. You'd make a better thing of life if you could begin it now."

"No. It would happen all over again as it has happened. The world wants routine. I want freedom. It couldn't have been any different, and a grand failure is as good as a grand success. I'll not be forgotten."

"One doesn't forget you, Jamie. Tom often wishes he could."

"Tom!" Jamie roared with laughter. "He'd give his eyes to be me and to know what I know."

"What *do* you know, then?"

"My wife."

Miss Lawrie gulped that down as best she could. It staggered and shocked her, because Catherine was an ominous inexplicable figure that had haunted her for years, a forbidding fortress whom she had to evade each year as she sallied forth from her retreat to visit the delectable realms of culture and success to which her years of travel and hard work, not to mention her fruitless love-affair, had gained her admittance—and she found that the only way to evade Catherine was to face her. She thought now that perhaps that was what Jamie had been doing all his life. If so, they were together in at least this one vital interest. She thought of the famous cheese-cake slipping down Catherine's nose, that never after that recovered its shapeliness, but seemed to have melted from mortification into the formlessness of old age.

"Catherine?"

Jamie wagged his head.

"A life-work," he said, "to let her have her way with me, to understand her and in a way to love her. The world is what the women will have it, and here are these factories and offices to keep us all safe and reliable so that they can know where we are from nine to five. That house of mine is a wonder for its routine. Every

soul in it has its pattern, its rhythm, its little series of noises to carry it through the day. I listen to them all and am caught up in the drama of it. Hah! No wonder the theatre is dead. Getting up in the morning, going to bed at night, the cooking, the eating—and the dreams they have, Mary, the dreams they have! A knock at the door is a great event, a letter is a wonder, and the things they know about you and Tom and the likes of me who waste ourselves in looking among men and women for the savage joy *they* take in themselves, living on and in and under the will of that woman, that woman, my wife. . . ”

“Don’t, Jamie, don’t.”

“It is wonderful,” he said. “Part of a great thing, a terrible thing, a deliberate subjection, to the town which is their town, chimneys and machines and a Hell of a great prison, and a town-hall, theirs because they have given their lives to it in perfect faith. But you’re a Londoner, if you are anything at all, and you don’t understand what they are up to. You don’t see it, for it horrifies you. You see what it seems to have done to me, and that disgusts you. . . but there’s more to come than even I imagine. You can’t waste human life. It will out in some magnificence. I’ve had my hand in it. I’ve been deliberate too, encouraging, exasperating the will in the woman. . . Isn’t there a saying: ‘*Ce que femme veut, l’homme le peut.*’ ”

Miss Lawrie corrected his pronunciation and said she believed there was such a saying.

“You don’t believe me,” he went on. “I’ve been to America and you haven’t. It is all one. The Yankees, these devils in my town, trains, telegrams, steam, factories, they are making nonsense of the kind of life your fine friends live in London, and she’s right, that woman’s right to wait and be secure and dream and dream. . . ”

"But why such tragedy, such hardness, such cruelty?" asked Miss Lawrie.

"She doesn't understand, she doesn't see beyond her nose, but she is sure of being right."

Miss Lawrie shook her head.

"It isn't right. There was no need for it. She could have let them all be educated."

"Educated? For what? To marry into the life she despises? The old life, the old life that was dead even when you and I came down into it all those years ago? Not Catherine."

"You're generous, Jamie, too generous, I think."

"She loves her life. She loves the filthy, noisy town, the rattle and the beat of it, and she's a subtle, stupid woman, the stuff of which life is made. It's not the clever ones like you, nor the fiery ones like me, but the subtle stupid ones that feel and live and will beyond themselves, behind and before and have more knowledge in their rump than you or I in all our wild imagination and book-fed word-ridden brains."

"Then why have you not told her so, and done what she willed?"

"I have done," said Jamie excitedly, thumping the table. "By God, that's just what I have done. I am, I have been the husband that she wanted and she's fooled the rest of you."

"If she had——"

"What?"

"Brains."

"Losh! Mary, you're dull! What would she do with brains? She'd gouge them out if she had any. . . Well, give me the money and let me go. I've talked too much, and worried you and your old age with things that are past your comprehension."

Miss Lawrie wagged her head sagaciously. Her eyes narrowed and her chin set at the challenge.

"Perhaps," she said, "I don't understand. Perhaps not. But I am glad to be allowed to have a hand in whatever strange thing it is that you see coming out it all. I have always, always believed in you, Jamie, though you never needed me until now. Or perhaps you did and could never tell me so."

"Maybe and maybe not. I only know that we are at the beginning of such a Hell as never yet has entered into the human soul. We cannot play our old part in it any more, husbands and wives, heroes and fools, tyrants and victims, we shall all be broken into the likeness of—the likeness of—a child, I think."

"You think too much, Jamie."

"Why not? Why this dread of thinking? You would all forgive me everything if I would stop thinking, but the thought in a man's brain is stronger than himself. It is not the man who thinks the thought, it is rather the thought that thinks the man. . . Well?"

"I could agree with you," said Miss Lawrie gently, "but you seem to me to be beyond argument."

"Of course. But why despise me for it? My need of affection is no less."

"There, then," she said, "let us be sensible. Brothers and sisters can at least be that when one of them is not married. I will give you the money you asked me for, and if you like to stay I'll be only too happy."

"You think they'd let me stay? You think there will not be a hue and cry when this leaks out that I have helped my son without knocking Hell out of him? The last abominable stroke of my old age. . . Why, she's been waiting these ten years for him to come to grief. She feels her strength that way, her righteousness and the vileness of every attempt to escape. . . Your life's been sweet, Mary, but apart, untouched, a little wasted all the fine things in you."

"I don't feel that any more," she said, "since you

have come to me. Neither do I feel old any more, or looking back. I can look forward with you."

"Inward," said Jamie. "Inward, for there lies the true picture of the world, all we have and all we are."

In her white parlour, virginal and filled by the presence of the naked woman with a kind of pervading music, she handed him the money, three hundred pounds, with another ten which she asked him to take to buy himself some clothes. He would not accept it, saying that what he had became him and would last out the little remainder of his life.

She clutched his hand on that and clung to him and looked long at his face, looking for the young beauty that was still alive in it, aching to think that he who should have had so much had driven himself into having nothing at all—and yet she knew that a smile, the most trivial gift from him was more than gold and power from those who had amassed them.

"O! dear, O! dear!" she said, "I'd dearly love to have you for the time that's left. But you belong to Catherine."

"Aye," he said. "I belong to Catherine—and Stephen, who has settled his account with her already. You'd never introduce me to your fine friends as your brother, would you?"

Now why did he say that? Why gratuitously throw in a test of sincerity? Why not be at peace when for once in a way he had been successful? The money irked him perhaps, or the translation of his purpose, deep, passionate, sublime, into trivial incident. Or perhaps he needed irony to convince him of the reality of whatever he was doing. . . Miss Lawrie was more hurt by his parting shot because she knew that she could not have introduced him to Miss Dickinson or Miss Warrington, her two dear friends in the district, without a pang of shame.

She had intended to walk with him to the hotel, where he must take the coach, but she let him go alone, standing at the bottom of her field and watching him as he strode along with his rapid crouching gait, covering the ground at a devouring pace, a tense, tragic, unique figure, that, appearing so suddenly, had torn away the wrapping of solitude from her life and left her uplifted but anxious with the undefined and undefinable revelation he had brought. The load of years of vanity and barren suffering fell away from her, and she sighed with a longing that of the two men in her life, Jamie and one other, one might have been made, and, fantastically, she almost persuaded herself that if she had thought of it sooner, Jamie might have accomplished it for her.

CHAPTER XIII

A DANIEL IN THE LIONS' DEN

ANNETTE in her elation at finding her hands full of money, more money than she had ever handled in her life, forgot that she was kidnapping Stephen, thereby setting a match to the magazine of the stucco house, where nothing was ever so welcome as an explosion. Her casual Folyat ways were anathema to Catherine, for whom everything must be solemnised by ceremony. When Stephen was to be sent to the stucco house there must first be exchange of post cards, time of arrival must be announced with the projected period of his stay. The unexpected must not be allowed to happen—if it happened it must be ignored. . . . So too if Stephen was to be taken away—there must be announcement, preparation, execution. Days must be allowed for the subjugation of the pang of change. Annette had offended time and again, and Bennett had been grievously taken to task for the unaccountability of his wife's unfathomable gaiety, which made her so constituted that severity and suffering alike slipped from her like water from a duck. In the midst of the most shattering calamity she would laugh until the tears swam in her eyes and when the laughing fit was over she would say childishly :

“ O ! dear, aren't I a fool-woman ?

If Bennett were irritable or beside himself with anxiety he would say :

“ You are ! A *damned* fool ! ”

There were times when the thought of her laughter filled him with horror, and rather than face it he would walk the streets for hours or go over to his mother's house and sit silently and a little enviously as she and his brothers (and his sister if she were there) went through their routine of passing the time until they moved towards their beds.

Thirty pounds all her own! Annette felt she could laugh the sun out of the sky. Wasn't it clever of her to know that the old man was the one to go to? He was the only one, next to her brother, Serge, who would not make a fuss whatever you did, but would look at it from the outside and see what was to be done—not that Annette could imagine herself doing anything very awful, or indeed thinking anything that anybody did particularly dreadful. You didn't worry about it if you didn't know, so why worry if you did? There was always something to be done, if you waited long enough, and she was glad that Bennett had kept silent so long because it had brought everything to a head. He might even make them understand that he did not want to go on pretending to be a business man when he wasn't one, or anything like it, and couldn't be like other men regarding their work for a bank or a company or a firm as a regrettable necessity which engaged the minimum of their attention. O! if only Bennett would let her take charge for a time, if only he would trust her with what he was thinking and feeling and wanting—but hardly anything was less possible for Bennett. She knew that he would just bury his face in her neck and murmur:

“I want only you.”

That was very nice, but it could not possibly be true, and if it was true it was too silly, because he couldn't make a living or even an occupation out of being married to her, though with anybody as obstinate as Bennett you could never tell, and there were times when he seemed

to be praying to her, times when he turned their room into a vast gothic place like a cathedral. They were wonderful times those and it seemed terrible then that he had to get up in the morning and go off to his routine as though their room was just a room, and their house just a house, and he just a man instead of a whole choir of voices chanting of a sombre terrible love that must surely burn all the senses away.

She had to go to see him now to tell him the good news, and to give him the money so that he could fly at once and appease the menacing Jew.

She walked with Stephen past the Concert Hall where he had been taken to hear Uncle Mark sing, and the new music-hall which was introducing the wickedness of London to the town, and then through the dark stinking tunnel, full of the odour of human bodies, dirty rags, to the dark abyss made by the mills on one side and by the warehouse on the other.

"This is father's office," said Annette and Stephen understood that it was a very awful place because of the enormous shining brass plates on the swing doors, and of the forbidding uncarpeted stairs, mounting which, they came to a little square window through which Annette could just peep. She tapped gaily, and in a moment Bennett's face appeared and he said in a forbidding Mrs. Bromley voice:

"What on earth have you come for?"

"Guess," said Annette.

"I'm very busy. Don't torment me. And they don't like women coming round.

Stephen felt rather hurt because no attention was being paid to him on the important occasion of his first visit to this place. He did not know that Bennett could not see him, and he crept quietly through a little door where he found an old gentleman sitting asleep at an enormous table. He climbed into a chair opposite and,

as usual, he composed himself into an imitation of the old gentleman's attitude and expression to find out what he was like, and he disturbed the old gentleman's slumber so that he waked up, gaping, and said :

" Good God ! A child. . . Where did *you* come from ? What do you want ? "

" Grandpa," said Stephen.

" I'm not your grandpa."

" No. You're not."

" You've got a fat head on you whoever you are. Who are you ? "

" Stephen."

" Stephen what ? "

" Stephen Lawrie."

" O ! Indeed. Young Lawrie's boy."

" Grandpa's boy," corrected Stephen who was meticulous in these matters of position and relationship.

" Well, you're the oddest young shaver *I* ever saw. You frightened me. Don't I frighten you ? "

" No."

" It's my business to frighten people. Huh ! Like some money ? " The old gentleman dived into his pocket, which gaped like a black wound across his stomach.

" My mother has a lot of money," said Stephen, ignoring the gesture unless it should result in half-a-crown, the only coin for which he had any affection. It did so and as he clutched the half-crown Annette appeared and whipped him out of the chair while she apologised to the old gentleman.

A fat hand went up.

" No apology, young lady. Mr. Thomas Lawrie is my friend. Mr James Lawrie too if he would only—Hm, yes. Well. That's an old story now. Worrying through, eh ? Had a nasty time, eh ? . . . Well, well, we'll stand by you, eh ? "

" Oh ! Thank you," said Annette, sighing with a

sudden intense relief, for Bennett had always seemed so hopelessly out of place, so abysmally misunderstood, that she had always felt that he must be heartily disliked. Ah ! people were kind if you only gave them a chance, as in her foolish Folyat way she did. That was the right way—she was sure it was the right way, and not the shrinking, snubbing Lawrie way.

The old gentleman shook hands with her and said :

“Take care of that boy, he'll do you credit.”

People always noticed Stephen, though for the life of her she could not think why, for he was nothing to look at ; and on the whole he seemed to be, so far as she could tell, unusually slow and stupid.

“I'm sure I'm much obliged,” she said. “I had to see my husband on some business, and the boy wandered while we were talking.”

“Caught me napping,” said the old gentleman. “You make that husband of yours take a real holiday this year. Wake him up. He takes his damned good looks so solemnly.”

Annette grinned at that, nodded her way out, returned to Bennett, and gave a glowing account of the interview, with a verbal repetition of the last remark.

“I'd take a holiday till Doomsday,” said Bennett, “if he would pay for it ; but they find out how much extra money you want and give you half of it, so that you can't move and you can't be ungrateful. . . . Why did you bring Stephen away ? ”

“I was so happy. I didn't go back to your mother's house.”

“What !! You didn't tell her ? ”

“I never thought of it.”

“You left his things there ? ”

“Yes. I quite forgot. He was at that woman's, the tobacconist.”

“That strumpet ! ”

"I thought she was rather nice."

Bennett looked pallid.

"There'll be murder," he said, "blue murder. They'll have the police out looking for him. They'll find out. O Lord! O Lord! I'll have to make a clean breast of it."

"I'll never speak to you again if you do any such thing before your father comes back."

"We can't quarrel here. There's no room for argument. I must do the best I can at once."

"Why are you so afraid of them?"

"You'd be afraid of them if you knew what they can do to you."

To Stephen the very air seemed to go up in a blue combustion, through the violence of the whispered quarrel.

"I don't want to go back home," he said; but Annette did not hear him, so furious was she, so alight, alert and alive with the flame of battle as she realised the fury that she had aroused with her lack of ceremony and her impetuous effort to take Bennett's troubles out of his own helpless hands. And all she got for her pains was a quarrel—a sudden violent quarrel that cut deeper than any they had ever known.

Stephen trotted along by her side, hardly able to keep up with her as she flew along, her eyes staring and her wide mouth set in a fierce determination to be done with these Lawries for good and all. They would, if they could, sit and talk and probe and paralyse, and reduce the life she had made with Bennett to a mere annexe of their own—not, however, if she could help it. That was a shrewd blow she had struck at them in going to Jamie, and she was sure that it had gone home. Nothing that Bennett could attempt would undo it, and she had made doubly sure by her excited abduction of Stephen: without his clothes, unprepared, unwashed. Ach! With such people you had to go mad, you had to be beside yourself and act

on inspiration, turn yourself into dynamite. These North of England people, smoke-ridden and heavy, suspicious, sly and full of condemnation !

She laughed a little hysterically as she lugged Stephen along to the Church of All Souls, where they could board a tram. Bennett could pay the Jew at once, and then there would be a month in which to have—and to enjoy—the almighty row that there was now no avoiding.

“ Why had she taken Stephen away ? ”

“ Why had she gone to Jamie ? ”

“ Why, in God’s name, had she ever married Bennett if she had not intended dutifully to accept her place in his family ? ”

They might ask their questions till they were black in the face. She did not ask herself or anyone else to be accountable. They might tighten their hold on Bennett, but she had her children to fight for, and would do so until she dropped—yes, even against Bennett.

Once again Stephen found himself being led to a new house. Annette bought some cakes for tea, and the other children, in their excitement, took no notice of Stephen, who sat looking at them and wondering why they were so different from what he remembered of them. They all chattered, and Annette was very gay, and when they had eaten all the cakes, sent Mordaunt out for more. He returned to an uproar when it was found that he had bought currant buns, for which he had a passion, though the others detested them.

Stephen could hardly eat, so oppressed was he by his feeling that he was an alien in this place, and by his sense of an imminent explosive trouble. The furniture was familiar, but the people had changed. They were no longer children, but were much more a kind of tight, collective turbulence, hostile to himself and everything else, but with gaiety and exuberance. Something very

important had taken place, in which he had no share. Because of it, he was both glad and overwhelmingly depressed, and his white gloomy face so exasperated Mordaunt that he lured him into the back-garden and knocked him down.

"Can you fight?" shrieked Mordaunt. "Can you fight?"

"No," said Stephen, heavily.

"Coward! There's your cagent! There's your coward's blow!"

Stephen accepted the coward's blows that were rained down on him, waited to be knocked down, was so, and lay there until Mordaunt should be weary of this fantastic performance.

"Get up!"

Stephen did not move. Mordaunt put his fingers to his teeth and whistled, and over the wall slid two hulking boys who, as they were bid, stood and looked at the coward and kicked him every now and then in sullen contempt.

"He's a rabbit!" cried Mordaunt.

"Put him in a hutch," said one of the boys in a husky voice that was near breaking.

"Put him in the fowl-house!" said Mordaunt.

They picked him up and started to push him head first through the hole by which the fowls entered their house when Annette descended upon them with a broomstick, laid about her and rescued the victim.

There was no ill-feeling about it for Mordaunt was very friendly that night in the bed which he shared with his despised brother, and told him that he was chief of a robber-band and also that he was in love.

"You'll have to be in love," said Mordaunt.

"Is it hard?"

"No. You just write her name on the fence near school and if she goes and looks at it she's yours."

Stephen shrank inwardly from the publicity of being

in love and did not think he could manage it. However he dared not say so.

"You'll have to learn to fight," said Mordaunt. "You don't really have to fight, but if anyone gives you your cagant you have to give it back to him."

"Doesn't it hurt?"

"O! no. Fighting doesn't hurt until afterwards. . . Do you like being at Roman Street?"

"Yes."

"I shouldn't. They're all so old, and *I* think Tibby's a witch. Do they always have cake for tea?"

"No. Shrimps sometimes and potted meat."

"I'm going there to learn French and then I'm going to France. I'm not going to stay there. I'm going to be rich. D'you know any stories?"

Stephen did not remember any stories. He was for the moment entirely engrossed in the problem of how to cope with the energy with which this suddenly enlarged brother of his was bursting, but, more deeply, he was saddened and aching with anxiety over the quarrel between his father and mother and the dangerous electric fluid which ran from it to the stucco house where his own private and wonderful life was centred, a life which, though he called it his, had very little to do with himself, and nothing whatever in common with this strange robustious boy's life that had been so violently revealed to him.

"Are you going to live here?" asked Mordaunt sleepily, after a long pause.

"I don't know. I expect Tibby will come and fetch me."

"Tibby's a witch. Witches have beards. Aunt Belle has a beard," came the sleepy voice out of the darkness. "If you stay here you'll have to do as I tell you, because I'm cock. I've licked everybody, but I expect you haven't got any muscle."

“That’s a fish.”

Mordaunt groaned.

“Muscle’s what you have in your arms to fight with.”

He groaned again. If this ignorant animal with its big top-heavy head and queer glazed eyes that shared his name, his bed, his father and mother were going to stay, it looked as though the splendour of his being might be gnawed at by a creeping shame. They had always said that Stephen would never live. Why on earth didn’t he die? . . . He gave a grunt, pulled all the bed-clothes round him and went to sleep, leaving Stephen shivering in the dark, but throbbing with a wild elation because of the immense knowledge that was mysteriously his and made it unnecessary for him to have muscle or to fight or to write the name of a little girl on a fence.

Stephen knew almost quite clearly that everything depended on himself and his grandfather. He never wanted to know anything clearly because directly he did so it turned into dreary nonsense and lost the magical quality that was in everything so long as he only knew it with a deep mysterious certainty like that which filled him now as his love reached out for Jamie and found him among the mountains of which he never ceased to tell in the musical brooding chant into which at his happiest he would fall, nodding to and fro, tapping with his foot, sucking at his pipe. Stephen took a long journey in the train in which he had seen Jamie go away. It went puffing and panting up into the mountains, coiled in and out of them and finally came bursting through the wall at the end of the garden of the stucco house to deposit its two heroes in the dining-room with their chairs one on either side of the fireplace, and David slaying Goliath and looking down at them with his enormous scimitar raised ready to spring out at anyone who, however slightly, menaced whatever undertaking they might be brewing.

In the morning Mordaunt sourly took his brother to school and showed him how to kick a stone in front of him without its going off the pavement. He also displayed the fence on which love was made, and the name he had written—Betty Billings.

“You can have her sister if you like.”

The school alarmed Stephen because the steps were worn away into deep hollows, and the idea it conveyed of innumerable ferocious feet sickened him. They had picked up several boys who fawned on Mordaunt, who seemed to become a more and more formidable and regal person as they approached the school, and looked down their noses at his little brother.

Mordaunt said very gruffly as they came up one by one :

“Yates. Hinks. Bettinson. Young Batty. Capron. His father's a dentist.”

Stephen could not distinguish between them, but he made a special note of Capron's teeth when his father, the dentist, was mentioned, also he looked about for Miss Betty Billings, but the girls were in another part of the building.

He was separated from Mordaunt. His name was taken and he was given a card and passed into a classroom marvellously built of glass—and the glass walls could be moved up and down. He found the lessons very easy, but irritatingly slow. The teacher went on repeating things long after he knew all about them, but the boy next to him had a pocketful of raspberry drops, and these warmed them into whispered conversation.

“What's your name ? ”

“Stephen Lawrie.”

“Ooh ! Mordy Lawrie yo' brother ? ”

“Yes.”

“Ooh ! He's a terror. My name's Bert Billings.”

The name made Stephen glow with romance. "My sister's Mordy's girl, but I don't think she'll marry him."

This rather dashed Stephen's romance.

"He fights for her a lot, but he wouldn't if I told him what I know about her."

Stephen refused the next raspberry drop that was proffered. Bert Billings had hurt his romance too much.

There was a break at eleven o'clock, during which they were all turned into an asphalt courtyard caged in and redeemed a little from its prison-like aspect with a few rows of privet hedge between the two sets of railings. No one took any notice of Stephen and he had a miserable time blundering into games of marbles, games of rally-ho, games of tip, rounders, until he found himself in what he thought must be a safe corner, from which, turning away from the boys' uproar, he found himself gazing gloomily into the girls' playground. . . Some of them seemed to him to be of a supernatural beauty—their hair streamed in the wind, their faces shone, their legs twinkled, and he thought that he must die if he should meet the eyes of any one of them. The bell ringing saved him from that dreadful fate, but all the day he was haunted with the image of a thin little girl in red with a face like a flower—only it was not the girl who held him so much as the promise of something that wrapped him round, caressed him, warmed him, and he was filled with horror lest he should learn the girl's name and be bound by the law of this place (with which henceforth he had no other concern) to write her name on the fence.

For the rest of the day he was off in an almost swooning dream of beauty, and when the bell rang at four o'clock his one thought was to run home to find something to break it. Roused at last to attention he found that his class was divided into two unequal portions for some purpose of which he was in ignorance. Thinking that the smaller portion would be the sooner liberated, he

joined it and with ten other boys was marched off to the end class-room where, one by one, they were laid over a desk and caned upon the rump. He watched the process aghast. The teacher wielding the cane loomed gigantic—the cane was ten feet long—the teacher's red moustache bristled with fury. Stephen thought he would repair his mistake by going. A terrible voice of thunder called him back. He was given no opportunity to explain, but was told that he would have twelve instead of six. He had them but was so stunned with horror at the injustice and indignity of his position that he felt nothing until he tried to walk home. . . . But only the more brightly did the image of the little girl in red shine before him. He was suffering for her, and would suffer in secret until the promise that she unwittingly held out was fulfilled.

He ran like one possessed past the fence, which seemed then and there to be inviting him to write up the name of the little girl in red, who would be desecrated by such publication. She was for ever sacred, something to be buried deep, deep beneath all the absurd wretchedness that was about to descend upon him. Kicks, blows, coward's blows were nothing compared with the assailants that could leap out of himself, waylay him, batter him until he crawled through his days almost insensible with the effort of endurance and resistance which it seemed he could make inexhaustibly. He had to make it in order to be alive to the promise of beauty. He had to make it because Jamie had made it and they were hand in hand.

It was not at all surprising to find Tibby at home closeted with his mother. It was always Tibby who was sent out to look for Jamie when the rest were in alarm about him.

"Here he is," said Annette brightly. "He went to school to-day. Did you like it, Stephen?"

"It was easy," he replied, holding out his hand to Tibby with something of Jamie's magnificent air.

"You'd like to stay at home now, wouldn't you, Stephen?" asked Annette.

He was chary of committing himself. It was not a question of whether he liked it or not. It was a question of what was the right thing to do for Jamie in the menacing trouble which he did not understand.

"It is time you played with other boys," said Annette.

Stephen's eyes filled with tears. There was some kind of comedy going on that was beyond him. He knew that Tibby was to be trusted, but Annette seemed not to trust her and to be putting on a grand air altogether unlike her.

"Mordy's too big," said Stephen, finding comfort in expressing the source of one of his troubles, though it might be the least of them.

"He'll learn more in our house than at any school," said Tibby, fidgeting with her gnarled bunches of arthritic fingers.

"I don't doubt it," snapped Annette. "More than is good for him."

"It is terrible without him," mumbled Tibby. "The night without the two of them has been terrible. . . Where can the master be?"

Annette tossed her head. She was enjoying this first encounter, with its assurance of the effectiveness of her onslaught; but she was not sure in which direction Tibby would throw her considerable weight in the dispute. Tibby she knew had been far more of a mother to Bennett than Catherine had ever been, for it was after Bennett's birth that Catherine had established quasi-royalty and devoted herself to maintaining it. On the other hand there was some kind of occult tie between Jamie and Tibby, which was so unfathomable as to make her unaccountable where he was concerned—and then there

was her servant's loyalty to the family in which Annette was the rebellious intruder, and therefore of no account since the last thing the family could tolerate was rebellion.

"He's a grown man, an old man," said Annette. "Must he always say where he is going?"

"There is always trouble when he moves," replied Tibby. "He sees things differently from everyone else and he cares not a rap what goes by the board so long as he has his way."

"But if he is right?"

"It takes ten years for the rest of us to see that," said Tibby. "And with him off on his wildness, and the boy gone, we're all at sea in that house, Mistress Bennett."

She sat with her mouth open while with her slow brain she tried to puzzle out the urgency of her errand and to find words to explain why she could not possibly return without Stephen. The reason was that Catherine had decreed that it should be so, but here was Mistress Bennett with a will just as strong as Catherine's—supple as hers was not, and fortified with a sense of the ridiculous that thoroughly enjoyed the situation.

"The mistress was put out," explained Tibby slowly. "You came to the house. You never wrote. You never said that you wanted the boy, or that you thought it was time he was put to school."

Annette laughed to think how little she had thought at all. The thing had happened. It had been like throwing a boulder down a hill to start an avalanche.

"I think he had better stay where he is for the present," she said. "If Mr. Lawrie wants him that is another matter altogether."

"Mr. Lawrie," said Tibby bitterly, "is of no account in his own house. Bennett, poor boy, was there last night."

"Well?"

Tibby's face became inscrutable and forbidding. It was not from her that Annette or anyone else should learn the mysteries of the stucco house.

"I was told to fetch the boy," she said.

"Without my permission?"

"She had Bennett's."

"Oh! . . . Oh!" Annette clapped her fists together in her exasperation. "Oh! And he said not a word of it to me!"

Bennett indeed had said not a word of any kind on his return late at night. Neither in the morning had he uttered a syllable before he left for his office.

"So my children are to go the way of hers, are they?" bounced Annette. "Stephen, leave the room."

Stephen, nothing loath, trotted away and hid himself in the dark cupboard under the stairs. He was at the heart of a pretty storm indeed. It was quiet there. Let it rage!

"You're only a child," said Tibby kindly. "What it has taken thirty years to twist can't be unwound in a day."

"Can't it?" thought Annette in her fury. "Can't it?"

"Stephen does seem to belong more to us than here."

"I'm not thinking only of Stephen, but of Bennett. What are they trying to do to Bennett?"

"I've seen that over and over," said Tibby. "A man's wife is only his wife, but his mother—aye, his mother is bread and meat to him."

"Stephen stays here."

"I'll tell her so," said Tibby, rising to her gaunt height and looking prophetically down at little Annette in her excitement. "I'll tell her so, and you'll never make your peace with her."

"I don't want to," cried Annette. "I never want to see her again."

She heard Bennett's key in the latch, and from habit

sprang to her last-minute tidying, preparatory to meeting him at the door, taking his coat and hat, fetching his slippers and taking his boots as he slipped out of them, generally with the exaggerated moans and groans which he used to express his contentment at being once more at home with her; the irritating, unjust and unintelligible world shut out.

She ran to meet him. He said not a word.

"Tibby's here."

Still he said not a word, and only ducked his head as though the name hurt him. He slid forward into the dining room and Annette hurried to the kitchen to make his tea and toast.

He was sitting at the table, huddled forward, waiting for it when she brought it. She waited for him to speak, but he had nothing to say and just stirred the tea in his cup round and round until he felt that she was near screaming with irritation, and then he stirred it round and round the other way.

"Did you tell them they could have Stephen?" she asked.

"One less to feed," he rasped. "They'll lend us the money all right. They're not so bad as you think."

"You asked—them—to lend you—the money?"

"I had to tell them the whole thing, didn't I?"

"But after the way they've treated me."

"You asked for it, turning up your nose at them. We can't all be related to earls and marquises."

"You beast," she said. "Have you forgotten how they treated us when we were first married, waiting for me to go crawling back to my family or for you to turn me out into the streets? Where's your pride?"

"Pride!" he groaned. "Pride! You'd have a lot of pride if you had to earn your living in this filthy town, where, directly you're married, they know that they've got you. Pride!—Don't talk to me, and don't meddle

with my affairs again. You can thank your stars that my brothers have worked and saved to keep that house going. Work and save! Two words that are not in your vocabulary."

Annette reeled and sat down heavily.

"That's your mother talking," she said, "and you've let her blame *me* for all this. That's the meanest thing you've ever done in your life, Bennett Lawrie, and because of it as long as you live you'll never be a man. You'll cringe and cringe away from the mean thing you have done. O! Hell, what does it matter now whether Stephen goes or stays, or whether I go or stay? She's had her way with you and you're her son and not my husband and never have been."

"Stop that!" he shouted. "Don't yell at me with Tibby in the house! For God's sake, don't. You might as well talk to the Cromwell Monument as to my mother. Of course she blames you. She's a woman, isn't she? And you're another. She blames you for marrying me in the first instance. Love-sick idiots we were."

Annette was mollified. Bennett was no match for his mother. The man was not born who could stand up to Catherine, and what he said was quite true. There was no good talking to that woman with her slow, callous, unrelenting grasp of an idea, and insistence on its becoming law when grasped.

"All the same," she said, "I'm not going to let Stephen go back just yet. You've gone to your mother. I've gone to your father. We'll see who was right. . . Are they giving you the money, or lending it?"

"Lending."

"O! O! I'd rather go on with the Jew than borrow money from relations. The song they'll make of it! The letters they'll write about it! The tales they'll tell to your rich old beasts! Have you no sense? Wasn't it that Phoebe woman who landed you in this

mess? A nice tale she'll make of it when she goes cadging to Miss Lawrie or old Tom, and they won't leave their money to people who have to borrow. What do you think she told old Maggie? That I was extravagant, went to theatres—But, of course, I don't matter. I'm only Annette, the parson's daughter who ran away with you. Jealous as Hell she is because *her* young men see your mother and run away to Australia."

"My sister Phoebe," said Bennett, pompously, "has been unfortunate in her affections. . . . I have done what I think best. I have made a clean breast of it and I feel an honest man again."

"And your mother is going to be master in this house? Not if I know it. If that is to be the case I'll leave it."

"Oh! Be reasonable."

"It is beyond reason. She has sent Tibby here to-day just as she used to send her to smell us out when you used to come to our house."

"It is not a question of my mother at all. Robin and Mark have taken charge of the whole thing."

"As if those two men had any will of their own! As if there was ever a night when they don't go to sleep envying you, and hating you for it!"

"Is there anyone in that house whom you will keep your tongue off?"

"Your father."

"That sot! That beastly sot, who made life a Hell for all of us."

"Only the Hell you all tried to make for him."

"Really, Annette, you do say the most extraordinary things."

She had startled him out of his obstinate temper, and he was again in love with her, religiously, as a being beyond and above himself, whom he could only worship. His will was so spasmodic, strong enough when it was a question of protective obstinacy, but fitful and feeble

when it came to action or decision. It did not much matter whether Stephen went or stayed. The boy was queer and had been so much away that he had stayed apart from the family, and was disturbing when he was at home. They set store by him in Roman Street, God knows why ; and Annette herself had often said that she had not the same feeling for him that she had for the others. Bennett's own feeling for his children was entirely through Annette. She had them, they made her happy ; he looked no further.

" You're so unjust," he mumbled. " You don't try to understand my mother, who has had a terrible life. I don't think she ever loved my father. . . . He swept her off her feet. He does that with people. He's like a—like a—well, it was like that when we were children. He'd carry you up and up and then down you'd go with a bang. I think he has a devil, and people have told me that before he got so horrible there was no resisting him. The pity of it is that he never turned it to any good use."

" The pity of it is," protested Annette, all the rage gone out of her, " that he never met any one who was good enough for him. None of his children are."

" I don't think you know what you are saying."

" Perhaps not. But I do know when I say that Stephen is not going back to-night."

" Why force a quarrel with my mother ? "

" Is it my child or hers ? "

" Yours, but you never made any fuss before."

" He's growing. He's not a baby any more. They've had enough of him, too much I often think, the whole lot of them living on him."

" What on earth *do* you mean ? "

" Well, if you don't understand what I mean I can't make you. Only it isn't healthy, a lot of grown-up men and women living in one house—and one child not their own. You sneer at us, but we did have the courage to

go out and make a good old healthy mess of things.— There now, we've talked enough. Go and tell old Tibby that Stephen is going to stay here for the present. I won't see her again. She makes me sick. If she wants to know why, you can tell her that Mordy and his friends tried to stuff Stephen into the fowl-house and that I think it will do him a lot of good."

CHAPTER XIV

“LET’S TALK OF GRAVES”

WHEN she had finished her house, Miss Lawrie’s first care had been for her grave. Wordsworth and his sister and Hartley Coleridge lay buried in the churchyard by the Rothay. She had not their renown, but she had the character to be of their company, and she was shrewdly of the opinion that character is of more enduring stuff than renown. However, the churchyard was full, and she had to take herself elsewhere, and was among the first to purchase a plot in the new cemetery two miles away in a barren field, round which the Urban District Council, in their modern weariness of the picturesque, had built the most hideous wall, as though they knew that their dead also would prefer villadom.

Miss Lawrie purchased a sheltered corner under the wall, placed an order for her coffin with George Wilson, the carpenter, and for her headstone with Sam Dixon, the mason, and felt that she had finally disposed of her material affairs and was free to accord where it was due the courageous kindness and sympathy which she had amassed since her unwilling escape from following the way of all flesh. This done, she felt that she was safe from interference and had secured her independence even unto the grave. Her brothers, Tom and John, pursued her with advice as to her investments, both being convinced that in this highest and most sublime of human functions there were mysteries beyond the capacity of a mere woman ;

but she ignored their advice, and rebuffed their frequent suggestions that they should take charge of her affairs.

On this, as on all other matters, she had her own opinions. She had managed to live for sixty and more years without male supervision, and she was not going to tolerate it now that she had won her reward of ripe ease and detached contentment. Besides, she had for many years been theoretically convinced, in spite of many practical disappointments, that there were occasions when money could be invested better in a human being than in some much-vaunted impersonal undertaking. She could see no reason why the rich, who could so much better afford it, should discard the warm wisdom of the poor. They invariably did so, and wasted on sponging worthless parasites what should have gone to the support and relief of merit and distress.

Still—three hundred pounds was a lot of money, and she was not at all sure that Jamie was a fit custodian of it. He could give it away as easily as threepence.

It was her habit when she was puzzled or depressed to visit her grave. It cheered her, perhaps because it was her own; or, perhaps, more philosophically, because to be lowered into the earth was the worst that could happen to anybody, and there was, after all, nothing so very dreadful about it. You could, with foresight and prudence, choose, as she had done, which particular piece of earth you would be lowered into, and what better could there be than a mountain slope facing South, warm under the snow in winter, gay with mountain flowers in the summer, until human lack of taste should make it deplorable with marble crosses and pillars, urns and statues of angels. . .

Miss Lawrie liked to look at her grave and to say: “Not yet.” The fret of anticipation, the ague of expectancy had passed away. Now she could live without distraction and she meant to do so as long and as fully as possible, all the more so after her brother’s visit

had spurred her out of the lethargy into which she had been in danger of sinking.

She visited her grave the day after he had gone, stood under the wall and wagged her head over her plot of earth, and said : " Not yet " ; and then she thought with some anxiety of the three hundred pounds in Jamie's pocket. How horrified Tom would be to know that she had done such a thing ! The idea of his horror so pleased her that she was irresistibly tempted to let him know. She had descended to Jamie's level. Well : Why not ? Was life to be limited to the appearance of success ? And was it a descent to Jamie's level ? . . . Ascent or descent, the movement was sufficiently thrilling and, apart from everything else involved, was in itself well worth the three hundred pounds. What fun did she ever get from her other investments ? They brought in their fifty or their hundred or their two hundred pounds, but she never knew what happened in the process. This time she would actually see her money working. She would have the pleasure of it, as she could not either from investment or from money disposed of in her will.

She was a little annoyed with herself for not having thought of it before, and she blamed herself for having acquiesced in the family's habit of ignoring Jamie and dealing with Catherine, which had always ended in a disastrous quarrel. That woman ! How she had imposed herself on Tom with her grievances and her outraged matronhood ! How subtly she had used the family's alarm to humiliate and destroy Jamie and to enthrone herself in security, feeding Tom's hunger to feel himself superior with Agnes whom Jamie had loved ; Agnes, whose fortune with her love had belonged to Jamie. . . .

Oh ! there was an immense wrong to be righted, and the three hundred pounds might go far towards the doing of it, if she followed it up and if—if Jamie did not make a mess of it. But he always did make a mess of every

ordinary practical undertaking. As Tom said, if he crossed the road with five pounds he would not have it when he got to the other side. . . . She was alarmed by this idea. Jamie had swept her off her feet. His immense power had intoxicated her and blinded her to his incapacity for handling it; except that she knew inwardly—and Jamie had driven her very deeply inwards—that, whatever had been his failure in the past, this was somehow a supreme effort, a kind of redemption and justification.

“I must go,” she said to her grave. “I must be at hand, and I must find out what strange thing it is he means in his wild talk about himself and Stephen.”

These thoughts reassured her, and as she looked up beyond the winding ribbon of Dunmail Raise, towards Helvellyn, it seemed to her that there was kindness in the mountains, the gentle strength that she had come to seek in the rather absurd fulfilment of her girlish dreams. It did not matter then that she was a little spinster in black, a passer-by, one who had tripped along the fringe of human conflict. She was even as the light upon the mountains, a spirit moving as sweetly and as beautifully, kindling to warmth, dissolving dew and frost.

Most certainly: “Not yet.”

There was work to do: the fruition of her life to protect and govern, the fusion of the love of all her life. Jamie, with the love of half her life (and all her disappointment), Andrew Burn, and the boy who might be, might grow to be, the very figure of her dreams, a composite of those two men. Ah! Having never had the exasperated possession of one man, she could love all men, mother and nurture them, deliver them of the boyhood that plagued and bound them in the search to which, in their strength and imagination, they were committed.

Miss Lawrie, quite rightly, saw all men, especially those she loved, in terms of Goethe and Dante, and, though they knew it not, her pupils could attribute their success to

this force of vision in her which raised their faculties and their ambitions to a higher power. Almost she regretted the waste of it upon others than her own flesh and blood. Might not the conflict of the stucco house have had a different issue if she had hovered and stood by and matched the subtlety of her wit against that of Catherine's cunning. . . . She might have been a match for Catherine, but Jamie would have been too strong for her. He lived at depths of passion to which none but he could penetrate.

Suddenly across the beauty of the mountains and the day a shadow fell, and she said involuntarily :

"Jamie is going to die."

The sight and the thought of her own grave filled her with a chill horror. There was never time enough. The end came always just as it was clear how much there was to do, how many days that should have been serene in fullness had been spoiled and emptied in sheer indolence and ignorance.

It was as though the mountains had spoken and told her that Jamie was going to die. The clouds came down and drank up every patch of green and golden light. She stood awed and silent and ashamed. How could she not have known that Jamie needed, had always needed, just the very quality of vision, just the power of encouragement which she had exploited to procure her own contentment and serenity ?

There was no room for hesitation now. There was no doubt that she must go.

Yes. She would go unannounced, descending on Tom with her baggage and her maid on her way South, instead of, as usual, on her journey home, when she could regale his sardonic boredom with tales of her distinguished friends. That would disturb his habits : about all that there was left of him to disturb.

So thought, so done. She packed up her baggage and

her maid and arrived in the afternoon, three days after Jamie’s visit, at the house on Cheadley Edge.

Tom himself came to the front door as her carriage drove up. (He had very little to do but to look out of his study window, while Agnes looked out of the window of her parlour). He rattled the half-crowns in his pocket and said :

“What on earth brings you here ? ”

“Jamie,” said Mary.

“I’ve heard nothing but Jamie these last two days : letters and telegrams, and Robin himself like a flustered funeral mute. The man has vanished.”

Miss Lawrie’s heart thumped as she thought of her three hundred pounds.

Tom was very angry and disgusted.

“We give the man a free hand to drink himself to death. In the name of conscience, why doesn’t he do it ? ”

“We’ve been all wrong, Tom.”

“Blethers ! I hope he’s gone for good. I hope he’s dead, though I’m afraid there’s no such luck. Some trollop in the town has got hold of him. A pound a week is not to be sneezed at.”

“No chance, Tom.”

“Then where is he ? ”

“He came to see me.”

“Drunk ? ”

“Sober as yourself, and I think you are more often drunk than he, and drunk with meanness.”

“H’m ! So I’m to be insulted, am I ? I’m the cause——”

“I think you are,” said Miss Lawrie firmly.

“Insulted in my own house ! ”

“It is permitted among relations.”

“Huh ! Inevitable between brother and sister, it seems ! Not a word to Agnes, please, or before her.”

“I understand that.”

Miss Lawrie was beginning to enjoy herself. This wrangling had broken the stiffness that had always oppressed her in her brother's house ; and, as he opened the study door for her, it seemed to her that he too was somehow relieved. Better a quarrel than nothing happening at all, and there are most welcome times when the past, that seemed for ever closed, must be re-opened.

" You look as though your mind was made up," he said.

" It is."

" On what ? "

He waved her to a chair and fell to pacing up and down.

" This thing has gone far enough," she said.

" I agree. I don't see how it could go much further. He has bled us white."

" I think—I know we have misunderstood him."

" Pah ! There was never any room for misunderstanding. His debauchery is notorious."

" His misery."

" Misery ? He roars with laughter at us. Lampoons us, turns his bawdy friends on to us, wrecks his own life and that of his children and leaves us to support them."

" You know that is not true ; and if it were, why not ? We are all responsible."

" How ? "

Tom stamped his foot in exasperation, then stood by the window tapping at the panes : that damned garden, that damned white gate, those damned trees in the garden opposite : the smug suburban houses on either side of the white road. Heigh ho ! One lived a damned long time to very little purpose.

" Is it his fault that he cannot live as the rest of us have done ? "

" There can be no great difficulty about it since the rest of us have done it."

" You must have your gibe, Tom."

“It is better to leave bad alone. We must all do what we are all agreed to do.”

“All the more then must one like Jamie be a law unto himself.”

“And let us buy him drink and mistresses.”

“There you are utterly, utterly wrong and uncomprehending. I tell you he is——”

“Mad is the kindest word.”

“The clearest, sanest mind.”

“Ruinous. Mad. Extraordinary, if you like. An ordinary man would have died of it years ago.”

“Your only grudge against him then is that he did not die. You were always jealous of him, Tom.”

“I? Pooh!”

“You had cause to be.”

“So you have come down to play conscience to me, eh?”

“To the family.”

“You’ll have a tough job with John. Maggie’s dead and out of it. If you want to blame anyone, blame Maggie and her iniquitous will. What a world it would be if it were not for you women!”

“A noble animal, the male,” said Miss Lawrie, drily.

Tom pursued his denunciation:

“Always giving in too soon, or trying too late to make amends: never up to time, never up to the demands of the situations you create.”

Miss Lawrie thought of poor Agnes living in the scorching frost of Tom’s scathing condemnation of everything but himself. She shrugged her shoulders.

“You are a disappointed man, Tom. Jamie is as eager and adventurous as a boy.”

“He’d need to be: a dismal failure of a man like that.”

“You’re wrong. You’re wrong. It is not for us to judge between you, but of the two of you it is not Jamie I would call the failure.”

"His miserable sons, his wretched daughter——"

"Who then is happy? And what is happiness?"

"Oh! you she-Pilate! One would think to hear you talk that Jamie was a kind of Jesus."

"I think we are all that, or Jesus died in vain."

"So it's religion then. Religion and strong drink. Ugh! The Scot will out in us."

"I've given him three hundred pounds."

Miss Lawrie's eyes twinkled as she felt her grip on Tom strengthening. He sat down suddenly and roared with laughter, a dry harsh laughter that crackled out of him.

"Good God!" he said. "What will not women do for a blethering man, a play-actor, bragging till we were all sick to death of it, and he must turn to children. He bragged the brains out of his own and then turns to his son's . . ."

"I think you have need to envy him his misery, Tom Lawrie, for yours is bitter."

"Grim!" he corrected her. "Grim! Use the right word if you must go nosing into the lives of others. . . . I say, leave them to it."

"I say, we cannot do it."

"Why?"

"He loves that boy."

"He'll ruin him."

Tom thumped into his open hand. His head was bowed, his shoulders were hunched, he seemed to be writhing with some incomprehensible misery.

"Aye," he said, with a deep sobbing breath. "Love is ruin. That's an epitaph for every one of us."

"You should be kind, then, if you know that much."

"I'm sick of kindness, sick to death of it. I don't hate the man, I don't despise him, I don't pity him. I simply don't understand him, and I threw up my hands years ago."

"Yet you support his wife."

Tom shrugged.

“I don’t mean financially,” Miss Lawrie continued,

“I mean—morally, which is more serious.”

“She had some regard for our family when he had none.”

“You have the result now.”

“*His* result. It is no affair of mine.”

“You have made it so, Tom. We interfered those years ago when he might have found a way.”

“He found it, as that kind of man so often does, in drink. What do you propose to do? What on earth is there to do?”

“I would like him to be at peace with her and the rest of us while he lives. You won’t believe me, Tom, but he is at peace with himself, as you and I are not.”

“He always was damned pleased with himself.”

“O Tom! Tom! That isn’t peace. To be at peace with yourself is to be at peace with God. *Jamie is that.*”

Tom, the proud sceptic, gave a grunt.

“Well,” he said, “I am still waiting for your practical suggestion. You have dug the corpse of the family out of its grave. What are you going to do with it?”

“I am going to call on it,” replied Miss Lawrie, “and I want to take you and Agnes with me.”

Tom started to his feet.

“Agnes? No, no.”

“Why not? Agnes, with her gentleness, would have done so years ago, but for your obstinacy. You declared that he would come to a bad end, and set to work to ensure that he should do so, in order to prove that you were right. You have been proved wrong.”

“How so?”

“By the love he has for his children and for Stephen.”

Tom’s face set like a stone and Miss Lawrie was sorry she had been so cruel. Nothing could move him, since nothing could alleviate the pain and disappointment in which he lived.

"You can put it to Agnes," he said at last, and that was as far as he could go towards surrender. "But when you have carried out your plan you will be no better off. Money can do nothing."

"That," said Miss Lawrie, "is my whole point."

She left him to his bitterness and sought her sister-in-law in her parlour. Exalted as she was, she forgot what time had done to herself, and found it hard to believe that this frail and fragrant little old lady was Agnes of the Lake, whose rare beauty had so disturbed the purpose and the history of her brothers, so that each had grimly and proudly followed out his destiny in the complete and obstinate failure of their generation.

Jamie, in this last upheaval, had brought a blaze of light into the darkness, and now it was filtering down through her own life, and through all the lives with which her own had been involved.

"It is a great surprise to see you so early in the year," said Agnes, putting away her Patience cards, which she only dared have out while Tom was "busy" in the study.

"Jamie came to see me and, as usual, upset me a great deal."

"O! dear, O! dear. The trouble those poor things have. If only—O! I think of them so much, and I have so longed to help."

"Why didn't you?"

"Tom can be very hard, though he is the best and gentlest man in the world, and the kindest husband, and so careful for my health. I should like the boys to stay with me, but—I sometimes think it is too late and Catherine is very difficult, and poor Jamie has been very wild."

She had a little, slightly husky voice that made Miss Lawrie want to weep for her futility. She had pretty, pathetic hands that busied themselves with tidying the table, while her sad eyes looked anxiously at the door

through which Tom would presently appear, slow and formal, to take up the routine of the evening’s amusement, *The Times* newspaper, a game of backgammon, reading from the poets and from the reports of the various committees on which he served.

“To-morrow or the next day,” said Miss Lawrie, “I want to take you and Tom to Roman Street to call on Catherine and on Jamie.”

Agnes’s hand went to her heart.

“O!” she cried, “I should like nothing so much, for it is lonely here, and those poor handsome, clever boys are afraid and ashamed to come and see us. They think we despise them for their father’s sake. Poor boys!”

She wagged her head like a bird, and crooned with pleasure at the thought that at last something, no matter what, was going to be done.

CHAPTER XV

HOLY WEEK

THE approach of Easter every year brought a crisis for Bennett. It was his dread lest, through the stress and strain and wickedness of the year, his faith should have vanished. He lived in alarm lest something so terrible should happen as would make it impossible to go to Father Smale with his annual semi-confession. He could not accept the Catholic catalogue of sins : to do so would be to become an out-and-out Papist, an un-English thing to be. His private life was his private life, and not even a clergyman was entitled to intrude upon it.

On the other hand, his lapses from holiness had a fearful accumulative power, and knowing from the newspapers and the talk all round him the dangers with which religion was beset through the blasphemy of the scientists and the atheists, each year made it seem more easily possible that not only his own religious zeal might vanish, but the whole fabric of the faith. He joined the English Church Union and prayed for Viscount Halifax, but he received a rude shock when the new curate at St. Martin's announced himself as a Christian Socialist. Blasphemy ! How could a Socialist be a Christian ? The High Church cause had dwindled indeed when such a thing could be.

It was a far cry from the simple prayer of Bennett's boyhood to the involutions of his outpouring and inhalation of religion in those churches where prayers

were sent aloft on clouds of incense. In the beginning he had prayed with simple practical fervour :

“ O ! God, save my father from strong drink, and grant that I, thy Servant, may never become a drunkard. O ! Lord, keep Mr. Folyat in good health and holiness, and suffer me to marry his daughter and follow in his footsteps.”

The latter half of the prayer had been granted, but the wrong daughter had been vouchsafed to him. At the time of the conception of his prayer he had not known of Annette’s existence, and he had left out of consideration the possibility of falling in love, so engrossed had he been in his longing to take his rightful place in the Church.

The Easter celebration was to him a thing so beautiful, a sacrament so all-pervading, that he could not believe himself worthy of it. Marriage had stained him—yet his marriage had been an inevitably glorious calamity. It had diverted his mother’s wrath from his religion to—Annette. He had no compunction about that, for his belief in Annette was boundless, though belief in a woman could not be the same as or take the place of faith in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, and in Mary the Virgin, Mother of Christ, taking to her bosom the Bride of Christ, the Church. . .

When, at full celebration, the three priests in their robes stood on the altar-steps and went through their solemn movements, Bennett could hardly contain the excitement, the cold awe that possessed him—the chanting on the right hand and on the left, the gradual winding towards the Host upon the altar, the production of the Host, the invitation to partake of the Blood and Body of Christ overwhelmed him with a fear lest he should be unable to move to play his part in the supreme ceremony and to share in the blessedness of it.

When he entered his pew he bowed low to the altar, and as he did so passed out of his day-to-day existence,

with its fret and worry and silly tantrums, and was lost from that moment in the eager movement of his spirit towards the altar, where, had God but loved him a little more and been a little less intent upon visiting the sins of the fathers upon the children, he would surely be standing, initiate, holy, inviolable. Sometimes, indeed, it was as though he were beyond the officiating priest, controlling him, putting the holy words into his mouth, giving out blessedness and achieving the miracle of turning the bread and wine into the veritable Blood and Flesh of our Lord. . . His life, his passion were there. The rest was a mockery, a strange phantasmagoria of marriage and children, and uncles and aunts, and people asking for money which he did not possess and could not obtain. He nursed no rancour about it. The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away, and the Lord visiteth large families upon those who can hardly buy them bread, but the Lord would have made no other provision if he had achieved his ambition to become a priest. He would have had even less money then, and he could not have been celibate, for the only possible refuge from his mother was a wife.

"I thank Thee, Lord, that Thou hast given me to wife, Annette, Thy handmaiden."

These quaint words were always the last that fell from his lips before he left the Church, dwindling from his exaltation to fatherhood and husbandhood and the thought of carving the Sunday joint for the hungry children swarming round the table with their shining Sunday faces and the unpleasant remnants of the glib service they had attended at St. Luke's, the nearer church to which he sent them with Annette that he might be alone in his own devotions.

His test for the validity of his worthiness to attend the Easter celebration consisted in the honesty of his semi-confession to Father Smale, and his readiness to attend the Three-Hour Service on Good Friday. That

always gaped in front of him like an abyss through which he must pass to attain beatitude. He must attend it fasting. He might faint or his conscience might send him shrieking from the sacred edifice.

Somehow, during this Holy Week that followed hard on the explosion created by Annette, his sin in borrowing money from a Jew weighed on him as it had not done through all the long strain and confusion it had created. It seemed to him that the Lord would forgive everything but the fact of his having been to a Jew. The worldly ambition which had driven him to do such a thing was a light burden compared with the insensibility which had allowed him to insult religion in his choice of a persecutor. Thrigsby was sinking from Godliness more and more into the hands of the Jews. The point was not very clear to Bennett but it was of immense importance, and reduced him to an agony as the crisis of Holy Week approached. He would never get through the Three-Hour Service, and his joy in the Easter celebration would be withered away.

His conscience pricked him on the subject of Stephen. The boy's religious instruction had been neglected. Mark was the only regular church-goer in the family, and his church was one of those polite places which are socially only just above a chapel and spiritually without force or grace. Perhaps God was punishing him for the jeopardy in which he had placed his son by his indolent compliance in his being held as a kind of hostage in the stucco house.

"Verily I have sinned and have been stricken with blindness," thought Bennett, and he decided that he would take Stephen with him to the Three-Hour Service and to Holy Eucharist at St. Chrysostom's, a church that in its hey-day had had rich benefactors, one of whom had installed stained-glass windows of the Stations of the Cross. He might even so far repair his neglect of Stephen as to

inspire the boy with the divine call so that he would in time become a priest and stand highest next the altar and bestow grace upon the people.

It was terrible what these Jews had done to Thrigsby. Time was when all these churches, like St. Chrysostom's and St. Martin's, and Mr. Folyat's church, had been attended by full congregations with fine ladies and gentlemen. Now congregations were small and poor or shabby genteel.

Annette shrugged when Bennett announced his intention of taking Stephen with him on Good Friday. She had had enough of altercation, and she was not altogether happy about the boy who held himself aloof from the family and seemed to be lost in some deep concentration and in some unfathomable and inexplicable pain. She thought Church could not do him or anyone else any harm, for Church had always been efficacious in relieving her of any obstinate unhappiness, but then three hours was a tall order for a child, however odd that child might be.

However, when it came to religion, there was no arguing with Bennett. He was like a man possessed with a divine wrath and was better left alone. Annette, who thought much and clearly in her loneliness, cut off as she was from people of own happy class and kind, knew quite well and without resentment that Bennett's passion for herself had very largely been the bursting of a religious ecstasy. She had the eyes and brow of a Madonna, quite enough to set him flaming—only the love they had as the result of it had so little to do with children and housekeeping and earning a living. It was very puzzling and tantalising, and the tangle of it all had not been made any the less difficult to cope with by Stephen's extraordinary impassive aloofness or the complications his dual existence had produced.

She imagined that Bennett thought God or Father

Smale could do something about it. She had her doubts, but the doctor had been able to find nothing wrong with Stephen and it might be that he would be like the infant Samuel and hear a voice calling: Stephen! Stephen! When, of course, he would reply—"Here am I, Lord," and all would be well. . . Annette always half laughed at her own belief in miracles, but none the less she knew that life works by miracles even if they do not fall out exactly as they are told in the Holy Bible.

On Good Friday, Stephen was given as many Hot Cross Buns to eat as he could devour (five, to wit) and set off with Bennett on the long walk to St. Chrysostom's. This rather astonished him, because he had thought that Thrigsby consisted of the stucco house and his own home and the road between them, but here they walked through streets, dingy and dirty, until they came to an enormous railway bridge, and by the bridge was a yard full of great boilers, each as big as the cave of Obadiah, who hid them by fifty and a hundred. Stephen wanted to stay and look at the boilers. They had a name painted on them—Galloway, and each letter was five times as big as a man. They were massive and splendid and full of innumerable rivets, very wonderful, beautiful too, and somehow mixed up with the little girl in red, perhaps only because they were that colour. There were timber yards too, and a great place with a wooden fence and brilliant advertisements, and the word "Football" printed many times. He asked what it might be, and Bennett said it was United.

The church was disappointing after that. It was ugly and built of brick, and Stephen, who had seen pictures of Notre Dame in Paris, and of Chartres and Amiens, knew that churches have no right to be built of brick. .

Inside it was very bare and big, and the altar was draped in purple. So, too, was the church, sombre with curtains.

Bennett bowed low and Stephen out of politeness imitated him. Bennett prayed for a very long time, but Stephen did not know what to pray for, and the church was so awful that he thought there was very little chance of getting what he asked. However, he begged earnestly to be made good, and asked God to bless his grandfather and to let him come back soon in the train that had taken him away. He was beset with a sudden fear that he had committed a sin in mentioning the train, because he rather thought God did not know anything about trains and boilers and Galloway, whose name was written five times as big as a man. He clutched a prayer-book to save himself, but was distressed to find, as the service proceeded, that he had very little use for it. There were seven prayers, and seven sermons and seven hymns or psalms or whatever they were. Father Smale did everything himself, and there was very little for the handful of people in the church to do but to listen as long as they chose or could. Father Smale seemed to Stephen to take the gloomiest view of himself and to be talking directly at him, convincing him somehow that God was very near and on the point of bringing the wicked to book. Stephen thought he would save himself by getting into a train. It was some old kind of wickedness that God disliked and was going to look into. If you got into a train you would be all right and out of it all. The question arose then as to whether there would be time. There certainly would not if they stayed in the church much longer—and this was only the fourth sermon.

The church grew very dark, as dark as the purple hangings in the chancel. A thunderstorm broke, crashed, rolled, tore the world in half. Stephen said to himself, This is the end of the world, and waited to be struck dead for his wickedness. When he was not struck dead he told himself that it was because he was in church. His grandfather was all right because he was in a train.

That comforted him, but he believed then that he had lived through the end of the world, at least of all the world that God knew anything about.

Before the storm ceased he breathed a prayer :

“ O ! Lord, save my brothers and sisters.”

The sun came out then and he felt sure that God had heard his prayer. You just have to wait until God is listening and then you get what you pray for.

Bennett sweated in his agony. He was hungry, he was ill, he was over-strained. The purple darkness of the church closed round him and suffocated him. This was the end, the end of his faith, and without that there was nothing, nothing but horror, disgust, exasperation. On his knees he moaned prayer upon prayer—standing, he bowed his head and folded his hands in submission, saying :

“ Lord, do with me as Thou wilt.”

But the Lord did nothing, gave him no sign, left him without impulse or expectancy. He was rejected—surely he was rejected, and this was the end.

Kneeling again he whispered hoarsely to his son :

“ Pray for me, Stephen.”

Stephen, delighted with his escape from the end of the world and the good form he was in for praying and knowing when God was listening, buried his face in his hands and prayed over and over again !

“ O ! Lord, bless my father and make him better-tempered.”

And again the sun shone for a sign and Bennett, watching his son, was released from his bondage, delivered into the faith again for preparation for the ecstasy of Easter, when there are eggs for breakfast in the morning and Christ is risen, and, though it is not the same as Christmas, some people send cards. Stephen felt very fond of Bennett as he knelt there praying so hard. Some people pray easily, some find it very difficult. He thought he would ask his grandfather about it.

On the way home, which in their famished condition seemed very long, Bennett tried to explain what the service meant, with its repetitions and mystical manifestation of the number seven, and how it all showed the agony of Christ dying to save sinners, not only those who had wronged Him, but all the sinners there had ever been and also those there would ever be.

"He died to save me and you," said Bennett simply.

"I think I'd like to be an engineer," replied Stephen as simply.

Bennett shut up like a knife. He must not lose his temper after such a service, such a deliverance, such an assurance that for another year he was in God's fold, but this boy was utterly and maddeningly stupid, an obedient dullard. What he was told to do he did literally, like an idiot. No matter, Easter was at hand. He would give Annette such an Easter as she had never known. Easter is the feast of the year, the holy zenith, the unfolding, the blossoming in ecstasy, the cleansing of the world with the Blood of the Lamb. He, like David, would be washed whiter than snow and purged with hyssop. Ah! The bad old days were gone. His sin was confessed and forgiven. He was at one at last with his family. Annette would see how unjust she was in her defiance.

That storm had cleared the air. Spring was coming. There would be summer soon with long green days.

"Heh! Stephen," he said, "I must teach you how to play cricket. Johnny Briggs! Ha! Ha! You should see Johnny Briggs bowl them out."

Stephen was always hurt by a sudden transition, and with Bennett he had always felt on uncertain ground, for there was no knowing, especially when he was exalted, which way he would turn next.

"Gloucester v. Lancs.," said Bennett. "Ah! Ah, ha!"

He swung his stick and began to walk at a furious pace so that Stephen could not keep up with him and lagged behind, ruefully remembering the tricycle which had been the beginning of all the trouble at the odd house by the private road. Bennett had bought a tricycle and had taken Mordaunt and Stephen out to display the modern wonder. An awkward machine with two enormous wheels, between which Bennett sat while he guided himself with a little wheel behind. He went slowly at first and the boys trotted along beside him, but then a frenzy seized him and he shot away.

Such a frenzy had seized him now, and Stephen was reconciling himself to being left behind in these unfamiliar streets, from which he would never be able to find the way. But Bennett remembered him presently, stopped, and called to him to hurry.

"Tired?" he asked.

Stephen nodded.

"Tired and hungry—I know. Good Lord! Don't I know! Never mind. We're going to be happy now and it's Easter on Sunday."

Stephen thought: "Do I go to church again on Sunday?"

"Father Smale is a wonderful man, Stephen, a wonderful man. How would you like to sing in the choir?"

Stephen was much too tired to pay any more attention. If they were going to keep him away from the stucco house he did not much care what they did to him. It was no more depressing to be dressed up in a cassock and a surplice and to go scurrying from vestry to chancel than to go to school and to have to pretend to be a boy, since the life of a boy, so far as he could see from Mordaunt's antics, was all pretence.

This was Good Friday. There was only fish to eat. The household was oppressed and subdued. It was a kind of Sunday, yet not a Sunday, and the Saturday

would be squeezed out of existence by the Sunday after it, when there would be more church, perhaps the abomination of Sunday School, and then church, with all the people subdued and ghostly and fantastic—something very wrong somewhere, needing Jamie to rouse them out of their somnolent acceptance of the strange meaningless performance.

Betty Billings went to church on Sunday evenings and Mordaunt met her afterwards and took her home. That was part of the ritual of being in love.

Somehow, church was mixed up with being in love and the fence on which names were written, and Stephen was so oppressed by it that he felt he could not possibly stay at home. He had no place there—nothing to do. Mordaunt did not want him and all the rest were engaged in occupations in which he had no share. If he had to stay in that street he thought he would absent himself as much as possible and spend the days with Miss Fish, who had a dog which coiled itself round her neck, or with Mrs. Walters who took in lodgers and wore gold rings in the afternoon and painted on glass, crystoleum it was called, two parts of a picture painted on two pieces of glass and then put together and stuck in a plush frame. . . But he knew that he would not have to stay long. Something was happening. His grandfather would come back in his train and then he would leave this strange exasperation of religion and love which was called home and go back to the real happy life he had always known, where words had their full meaning and at any moment there might stream through the darkness a splendour of light like that which shone round the head of Jesus in the pictures. Stephen remembered having seen people shining like that, but long ago, when all he could remember of himself was that he was lying beneath immense waves of darkness that made the place where he was change its shape every moment.

The Church, on Good Friday, had made him remember that, and it hurt him to come home and find his mother just busy and happy and active, very small in her light bodice and full skirt, and with just an ordinary face like that of any other women. He was quite sure he had seen her, too, shining with a countenance in which everything lived, so that it was impossible to look away from it. But that, too, was long ago, and something had happened to these people so that he no longer belonged to them. They were too happy or unaccountable, or erratic with their sudden frenzies and transitions and plunges from Jesus to Johnny Briggs.

Annette said in his hearing :

"I don't see why he shouldn't go back to them. He will never be any good. He takes no interest in anything and he only upsets the other children."

Bennett replied :

"Well, your children are your affair, and he was never like the others. You washed your hands of him as soon as he was born."

Annette started as though she were amazed at so much penetration from him and she said with a merry laugh :

"At any rate you were never jealous of him as you were of Mordy."

They were merry in the house that Easter. The Jewish wolf at the door was appeased and presently would be gone to someone else's door. Mordy was in training for a scholarship (whatever that might be)—Uncles and aunts could not live for ever, and a day would come, a day would surely come when Annette and Bennett in their turn would be able to sit by the fire and grumble at the young and disapprove of everything they did.

Bennett was so elated and so sanguine as to the hundred and one projects that seethed in his brain that Annette, adoring him, could hold out no longer. After all, life was too sweet to waste in quarrelling. Nothing she could do

would alter the old woman in Roman Street. She would take Stephen back—the boy was hopeless. Someone would have to leave him some money or he would surely die—but nothing would induce her to apologise.

“I’ll do my best not to be rude,” she promised Bennett, “but things do trip off my tongue, and if she lashes that old man in my presence I won’t answer for myself. After all, he is your father and if I hadn’t gone to him you never would have moved, and where *should* we have been. . .?”

“I sometimes think,” said Bennett, “that if it weren’t for him, I never should have married you.”

“And you’re not sorry?”

“Sorry? Good Lord!”

His arms went round her and his lips mumbled her hair. He was content. What did it matter if he never became a priest, or never won a proud position in the world? What was it his father was always saying? The honest man’s the gold? It was enough to be in love with Annette, to make love to her, inexhaustible, profound, mysterious, surprising Annette, who could look like the Virgin Mary and scold like Katherine in the play, though when she came to the point she always let him have his own way.

“There is something about Easter,” he said, “that gives you a new life. I’ve often noticed that. No matter how dark things look in Holy Week, Easter comes and everything is new. You must always have a new dress for Easter and I will have a new tie. But we mustn’t wear them before Easter Sunday or the birds will spoil them. Ha, ha! People may say what they like, but there is something in religion. Let them try to live without it—ha!—and we’ll see. Ha! Blasphemy!”

CHAPTER XVI

JAMIE BREWS A PECK O' MAUT

THREE hundred pounds in the pocket is a good comforter. Sixty good crisp clean notes. Jamie had not seen so much money since he had left Cateaton's. The few hundred pounds of debts left by his bankruptcy had been paid off by tens and twenties but he had never troubled to take out his discharge. What use had he for money or credit? He had turned away to find another and, if possible, a better way of living, a means of working through a swifter, surer contact than the jealousy and suspicion set raging by the old way. He thought he had found it and was none the less sure because it drove him more and more into isolation. Love was a state of being, not an act. So much was clear to him. It had never been explored. That was no reason for not doing so. People made fuss enough of Stanley and Livingstone and Franklin, who merely went to Central Africa or to the North Pole; journeys which were as nothing, either in distance or in danger, compared with those which could and must be taken into the state of being whence came the loveliness of poetry and painting and music. He had come late in life to the decision to take such a journey, but for that his purpose was only the more furious. Bankrupt, drunken, disgraced, despised, he had set out, not to dream but to live, sure that he was right and that he was born for this and nothing else, to cut a way through the jungle of human existence where

lurked the serpents of desire, the wild beasts of passion and the fevers of hypocrisy.

Years of darkness and solitude he had spent, years of vain wanderings, torn and spent, racked with anguish, seeing with a helpless clarity what things were done in his absence, what treacheries committed upon him and his flesh and blood for whose sake he had been forced out to find a way they could follow, a region where they could live, an America that could satisfy the hunger of the spirit. He had found it. No one believed him. He was called a liar and plunged in deeper and ever deeper disgrace. That only made his vision more lovely and his power to hold it the greater. He could endure. The living death they sought was not for him, and the death they dreaded would be welcome whensoever and howsoever it came, just as the sun was welcome in the morning, or the stars at night, or the blue bells in a wood in spring, or the agony and degradation he had suffered rather than relinquish the knowledge that was in him, more living than himself, the knowledge of the power and the gentleness and the tingling comprehension of creation, that never ceased, never stayed, and bound all things together in the smiling grace of the unity of its becoming. . . Ha! ha! He patted the three hundred pounds in his breast pocket. He had soon put a stop to that nonsense and snatched away the evil town's delicious morsel of young love. The town was only evil because its people did not know how to live in it, or what to do with the immense power and wealth their work created, and could only get out of it the pleasure of destruction, the sickly mortification of perpetual ugliness. They were cramped and held down by their inherited dread of London and what London could do to them, with that old woman on the Throne forbidding life because her husband was dead. Natural enough, good Lord, but not for millions of young lives, and not for generation after generation—sitting,

sitting, watching life go by, ignoring change until they could not live, so little was there left that they could recognise. . . There was a splendour in Thrigsby even as in the mountains. The tall chimneys, the huge square blocks of the factories with their hundreds of windows lighted up, the iron bridges and the steel rails threaded and knotted through the place, the glimpses of whizzing wheels and spinning belts, the compressed, suppressed vitality of it all.

He could not see clearly how the long suffering of his life was connected with it, but he knew that it was so. His only link with it was through Stephen, but that link was strong and would not break. He had found the way through to the mind's perception of Creation, and all the strange, hideous wonder of the devouring, destructive town would follow—in good time, all in good time.

His mind went back to the days of the famine and the war in America when he had ragingly denounced the place and all its works, the vile manipulation of the banks and the gambling on the outcome of the war, which had ended in the crash and the closing of the mills. They had marked him down after that, the blank-faced men who had thought it would do the poor no harm to go hungry for a year or two, and he had fought them at first with stinging jibes and lampoons, but that was the wrong way. They could only be fought on a plane to which they could not ascend, a plane on which the will could act directly and the spirit could attack them in the rear, cut off their retreat, and leave them in a foolish emptiness. That was happening, had happened to his brother Tom, and all the Toms, isolated with a success that chilled them to the very bone, so that they could do neither harm nor good—a wasted generation. The world could afford it, though never could it afford to let young love go down.

Journeys were cold and arduous in those days, and when he reached Thrigsby, Jamie was perished with the cold. The more to pursue his purpose and to take Stephen with him upon his quest of it, he had cut down his acquaintance until he was nowhere known in Thrigsby but at the office of the News for bread, Hepworth's for drink and books, and Miss Meekin's for comfort and a refuge. He felt strangely ill, and his vision of the dawn as the train ran slowly in had been so clear, so beautiful, and so mystically intimate, that he felt in it something of the gravity of a farewell. He just nodded his head in recognition of it and swung off with his loping stride to Hepworth's.

"Hello! old ghost!" said John Hepworth.

"Ghost?"

"Aye! We thought that you were dead."

"I'm cold," said Jamie. "Just off the train."

"Been up to London to look at the Queen?"

"The Queen? No, she's no laughing matter. I'm through with everything that is not that."

"Old heathen. They took you by the left leg and threw you downstairs, eh? . . . I've some good Scotch here."

"I could do with that."

He had had nothing to eat for hours. On an empty stomach whisky could set him raving at once. He gulped down the toddy which John Hepworth had brewed good and strong, coughed, stiffened himself and glared, while the fumes burned hot in his brain, and he said:

"John Hepworth, what, in the sight of God, whom we know in the soul, is the difference between a bawdy old man and the Holy Spirit?"

"Lord! he's off," muttered John Hepworth. "That was a quick one."

"Have out the dirty books," roared Jamie, "and find

the answer ! Come on, now. Rabelais and Casanova and Rousseau and Balzac and all the tales of monks and nuns."

The word ran through the cafés near by that old Lawrie was off again, and one by one his old cronies came in, with a few men from the Arts Club across the Town Hall Square. Whisky ran freely. Hepworth's was itself again, but this was a new Jamie, no longer sardonic, but more terrible for his gentleness, and the winsome grace with which he fed their appetite for bawdry.

"Lewdness ! Lewdness !" he said. "There's truth in that at least, for not a man of you but dreams and dreams of an almighty—to blow the crust off your brains and the lousy itch of money from your nerves. Aye ! Master Rabelais and I have sized you long ago. You've had my guts, and words of mine have gone ringing down the cellars of your brains and haunted you in all your lies and all your thieving and all your lechery. The old man's hair is thick with mud and dung, the dingy scarecrow frightens your crow-like thoughts away, but the Holy Spirit is here bringing joy to birth. . . . Here, have you read your Timon of Athens ? How Timon dashed the water in the faces of his guests ? I could do that to you who have gnawed my guts away. But I am proud and simple and full of knowledge, and you are men, and God has spared me from contempt. I know you though, and your sons will know you, and words of mine will go ringing in your ears as they go marching down to Hell because of you. My sister has a naked woman in her house, the beauty that we serve and cannot stain."

The rhythm of that last sentence tripped in his brain and he said, glaring through his half-frightened, half-hypnotised auditors :

"My sister has a naked woman in her house. My sister has a naked woman in her house,—or soul. It should be soul. House and soul is all one, or should be. My sister has a naked woman in her soul, and so say all of us."

He smiled with an enthralling sweetness, rose, bowed, took up a copy of Rabelais and wrote in it :

He died and left his laughter to the poor ;
The rich go hungry to this very day.
I died and left for all an open door
That none may pass but children at their play.
The fire of life made ashes of my dreams
Whose bondage made of half my life a Hell.
Yet Heaven through the open doorway gleams ;
Whisper my name, whose tale no man can tell.

“ Gentlemen, in the divine sobriety of death, permit me to read you my epitaph. Master Rabelais and I have entertained you. We have loved you and incurred your misunderstanding. In that we have been rich. . . . Good morning.”

So saying, he stalked out of the shop, and nodded farewell to it also, to the books and laughter he had enjoyed there, the wit and the coarse good fellowship.

“ The old devil’s ill,” said one man.

“ Dying,” said another.

“ I got a shock when he came in,” said John Hepworth. “ I called him ‘ old ghost ’ when he came in. Ah ! There was no one like him for books. I think he had read every one that was ever written, and he knew the name of all the writing men and what they were doing and how far they could go.”

“ He’ll have written books maybe ? ”

“ Nay,” said John Hepworth, almost weeping as he watched his shop slowly emptying. “ You couldn’t write the torment of that man’s soul. Not even Shakespeare couldn’t. It bursts your skull to try to think of it.”

Jamie was in a blissful state of clear ecstasy, but terribly drunk and bothered with the fumes of the whisky that kept him warm. There was no mischief in him, none of the old mad desire to finish where he had begun in his own house. All that was settled for ever. He was master there and over much else beside, more than he could ever

dream, more than could ever be known. Let them bide, let them be. . . .

He had his refuge, the parlour behind Miss Meekin's shop. He made his way thither, saying good-bye all along the road, to the yard opposite the baths, with its flying gantry, to the cooper's yard with its gleaming yellow barrels, to the Deaconess' Home—(what was a Deaconess?) to the synagogue, to the decayed genteel houses, full of memories of the old prim days when Catherine had worn a crinoline and he had done his best, like all the other men, to look like a Crimean hero; and to the pond in the park, where the ducks tucked their tails in the air and paddled themselves along head downwards.

How Stephen had loved the ducks, the solemn grave-eyed little boy, who quivered so at any hint of beauty, and was aflame at once when Jamie let him feel the thrust of that invisible beauty that he had discovered and released in the soul. . . . Hey! There were crocuses already in the dirty grass. Crocuses! And this was Spring, the death of winter—winter with its white hair full of dung and dirt.

It began to snow. Winter always died hard, always allowed the Spring a false start with the crocuses and singing birds, poor things, rushing to their mating on the first deceptive gleam of a warm sun.

He reached Miss Meekin's shop and lurched against the door, making the rusty bell jangle, jangle, jangle. Miss Meekin was busy with two men, her betting touts—a miserable business, sixpences and shillings, nothing more. Yet that was how money was made, in pennies and sixpences from the swarming poor. Scrape, scrape, scrape! Jamie leaned on the counter and watched them, the fat, blowsy woman, the strange tangled mixture of good-nature and avarice, and the two men, seedy, decayed, anxious; verminous in mind and body. Their hands fascinated Jamie, the woman's fat, capable, deft,

the men's feeble and quavering. The jangling bell had made the men almost sick with fright and they leaned up against each other for comfort and support.

"Go inside, Mr. Lawrie," said Miss Meekin. "I shan't be long. You look perished, silly old man. You had ought to be in bed on a day like this. . . ."

Jamie nodded and tottered through to the parlour where he sank into the hard horsehair chair by the fireplace. The warmth hurt him. He held out his hands towards the blaze, a dirty, wrinkled old hand. He looked at it as he had looked at the hands in the shop; nothing more human and terrible and tragic, than hands. He held his own close to the bars. The light shone through them. They ached and tingled. He must have been terribly cold for a long time without knowing it. Cold, cold, cold. The fumes of the whisky he had drunk rushed streaming to his brain, pressing down, squeezing, crushing until with a puppet-like convulsion he crashed down into the hearth.

Miss Meekin rushed in screaming and dragged him out, laid him on the sofa and ran through his pockets.

"Good Lord!" she said, as her hands grasped the crisp, clean notes. "Three hundred pounds! I always said he was foxing, him having been manager of a bank and all. I don't care who it is. Put 'em near a pile 'o money and some of it'll stick."

It was her habit, knowing Jamie's foolishness in throwing money away, to run through his pockets and to keep anything she found there for him, so that she had had as many as twenty or thirty pounds for him at one time or another. He never knew, but he had learned through the five years of association with her that somehow there was always money to be had if he or someone poorer than himself needed it. He was as near a husband as she had ever known, and the nearest to a child.

She had never seen him look so pinched and ghastly,

and she began to blubber over him, held his cold hand against her bulging breast, chafed it and slapped it while her fat face wobbled, and her foolish eyes bulged and oozed tears that made havoc in her paint and powder. If he should die on her! O! Christ, if he should die on her, whatever should she do? There'd be an inquest and the police, and she couldn't bear him to die, for he had a way of looking and a way of talking that made you think he might be the Duke of Westminster himself if you didn't know all about him.

She was scared by the money and hid it in the tea-caddy—three hundred pounds.

He might be there for hours, and then he would be queer and irritable and want soothing and petting until he was like a sweet child again, full of fancies and tricks and jokes and tripping words. Miss Meekin could imagine nothing more lovely than the times when Jamie and Stephen were together in her parlour, playing Old Maid or Beggar-my-Neighbour or Dominoes, and then setting to with their play-acting and their poetry. . . A half a pound o' steak and a pint o' porter, that's what he would want when he came to.

She went round to the butcher's and the grocer's and bought these for him.

"Mr. Lawrie back?" said the grocer with a wink.

"Mind your own business," replied Miss Meekin tartly.

She cooked the steak, with crisp potatoes and fried onions, and put it in the oven to keep warm, and then sat by Jamie holding his hand, cursing volubly when the bell called her away to the shop. She was sick to death of Murray's mixture and Gallaher's and W. D. and H. O. Wills. . . If she could only lie by Jamie's side and hold him and make him warm! Funny that men never understood that in a woman—just to lie close and give comfort. . . She went off into a silly waking dream, that she was young and Jamie was young and they were

both respectable. Jamie was a clerk or a policeman and Stephen was their baby and when Jamie came home in the evening she put on an india-rubber apron and gave the baby his bath, and pulled up his legs and held out his buttocks to be slapped. People had rude jokes like that when they were happy. . .

Jamie woke up when it was dusk and lay still, looking round him with a piercing, puzzled expression in his eyes.

"Enough to give you your death of cold," said Miss Meekin.

Jamie said, as he always said on these occasions:

"There'll be Hell when I go home."

"You're not going home to-night," said Miss Meekin.

"There's snow and you look finished without that."

"Finished? Heh!"

"There's steak and porter for you."

"A glass of water."

"It'll kill you."

"A glass of water, cold water, damn you. I'm thirsty."

In alarm, Miss Meekin brought him a glass of cold water and he drank it.

"I thirst, and they gave Him vinegar," he said.
"More water."

"No, no."

"More water."

"It'll kill you."

But she fetched more water and he drank it.

"You're a good soul," he muttered. "But I can't move. Have they been here looking for me?"

"Yes. That old Scotchwoman came. My, she can be rude."

"Aye, she can be rude, can Tibby. She's worn out. What did you tell her?"

"What could I tell her? I didn't know you'd gone."

"No. That's all right then. Where's Stephen?"

"His mother took him home. A spit-fire that. One of them little women that spring at you like a cat."

"I like them massive," said Jamie with a chuckle.

"I know you do," sighed Miss Meekin with a grimace of happiness, and he laughed aloud. He had always enjoyed Miss Meekin's grotesque dreams, and had been most nicely careful never to let them be translated into fact.

"Do eat something," she wailed. "God knows what you've been doing to yourself, but I always knew it would end like this."

"I have been," said Jamie, "in a train, and up in the mountains and to the very end of myself. This town and I are parting friends, but if his mother took Stephen home there's been a crash and——" He could not make the effort to think out all the complications. It was warm here. The good bawd by his side was comfortable. If it would make her happy he would eat. . . A competent old bawd, she was, a good old bawd, something solid and generous among the mean futile shadows of the English life that had gone so grimly grey, so desperately wrong.

He tried to sit up at the table but ached with stiffness and had to ask her to hold his plate. The porter was good and eased him.

When he had finished he said :

"Pah ! I'm dirty,—dirty. A disgusting old man. I wouldn't like the undertaker to come near my corpse."

"O ! don't talk like that," cried Miss Meekin.

"Get me a clean shirt and drawers and socks," he said. "I'll go home clean. I'd have new clothes if it were worth the while, and a new hat. My sister told me to get new clothes, but it is not worth while. They'd die of fright if they should see me in a new hat—but my hair and beard shall be white, and to-morrow I'll be sober."

"He's mad," sobbed Miss Meekin under her breath, but she humoured him, gave up her bed to him and put

him in clean sheets, hovering in and out all through the night on the least sound he made in his sleep.

In the morning she went out and bought him a new shirt, new drawers and socks and a linen collar, laid them out for him to see, and then, as he insisted, she washed him from head to foot.

"You poor old bag o' bones," she said, "but you've been a fine figure of a man in your time and the women looking after you, I'll bet. But you were never the kind to spend money on women."

"Hardly," said he. "Why buy what can only be given?"

"I daresay," she went on wistfully, "you're past all that—but some men never are."

He dressed himself with great care and was a good deal worried by the age of his boots. A beggar would not have picked them from an ash-bin.

"I'll wear them," he chuckled. "A man must dress to suit his wife."

When he was ready he sent a telegram asking Annette to bring Stephen to see him at the stucco house as he had a grand success to report to them and her troubles were at an end.

He was erect and splendid in his rags. His face was pinched on the cheeks and temples, but his eyes shone blue and gay as he turned into Roman Street, resolved on entering his house for once in a way by the front door, pushing open the ridiculous curly gates and saluting Tibby as she looked down from her window over the porch, and Catherine as she peered over the ferns and aspidistras in her parlour.

CHAPTER XVII

COUNCIL OF WAR

JAMIE'S disappearance and the abduction of Stephen set the stucco house rocking. Its life had been arranged so that nothing whatever, good or bad, should happen, and the mere shadow of an event could bring terror. An event of any kind was a defiance of Catherine. It was for this reason that she objected to Annette's growing family. Birth was an event, a defiance. Stephen had been adopted as an inmate of the stucco house in the first instance to relieve Bennett of the expense of half his family—but what was the use of relieving him of one child if Annette immediately had another. . . . ? Catherine was rootedly convinced that neither Annette nor Bennett was to be trusted with money, but then she believed that of everybody, without exception, and if there was anyone in the world whom she pitied and despised it was Agnes, who had allowed that Tom Lawrie to assume control of her fortune.

Catherine's temper suffered the more severely under the stress of the dual event as she was at the time in robust health, and could not take to her bed with either bronchitis or gouty indisposition, her two favourite complaints. Besides her doctor was away, her new doctor, for her old doctor, a connection by marriage of those accursed Folyats', but for all that the only man who had ever understood her constitution, had eloped with his cook and gone to Australia. Something was going

very wrong with Thrigsby and its component part the world.

Up and down Roman Street there was nothing but a series of events of the most despicable character—sons being sent to Canada, daughters going on the stage—it was said that Mr. L'Estrange, at 45, had conspired with his nurse to poison his wife—and two families had been left stranded within a week, Mr. Coles and Mr. Partington, both having walked off without a word, without a word ! A Godless and light-minded generation. Soft people, feeble hysterical people. Where was the woman who had had a heavier cross to bear than her own ? She had borne it, and would bear it to the bitter end, as people should in this world which most emphatically was not created for their amusement, but for the production of children and their maintenance in the station in life to which God had called them. God had called her children to be the offspring of a drunkard and a Lawrie, and who was she to complain ? Never, she believed, had a word of complaint crossed her lips, and never had she made the slightest attempt to alter the will of God. For all that, she was human. She had her sinful desires, but she suppressed them, and so must every one else. Only she and Stephen knew that there was a man who passed the house every day at half-past four, at whom she nodded and smiled and waved her handkerchief. The man never knew it.

Robin was so upset by the awful things that he imagined Jamie might be up to, and by Annette's appalling effrontery in taking Stephen away without so much as a word, and by Bennett's terrible revelation that he could not go near his ships, neglected their voyages, found it impossible to bear the creaking of his mother's shoes and her half-talking to herself, and at last took refuge in the deserted dining room, the abode of the delinquents. He sat there gloomily, rattling the money in his waistcoat pocket and

staring into the fire, on the whole, however, enjoying the change, and thinking that this affair of Bennett's would postpone, even further than its present remoteness, his taking of a real voyage to Egypt or Assam, or up the St. Lawrence to Niagara.

He was beginning to feel ruefully that a trip to the Isle of Man or across the Channel was not enough, even though he made it a little more like the real thing by wearing a yachting cap, and carrying a compass and sextant in his pocket, and a telescope slung over his shoulder. He did not complain, mark you : he probably knew more about the things he had not done than if he had done them, and Bennett's being married was almost as good as being married himself. No : he did not complain. He had had to stand between his mother and his father. That had been his duty, and, like Catherine, he had done it, even to cracking the old brute's head open with his slate years ago. . . . He thought of that with a certain satisfaction. Though he abhorred the idea of violence, he enjoyed violence itself, and the possibility of a recrudescence of it excited him.

How dull and lifeless the house was without the old man ! Its routine became irksome, the habits of its inmates detestable. Even the cats could not keep still. They wandered about sniffing, with their tails up and their fur bristling, alarmed by the coldness creeping over the place. Robin, sitting there in the dining-room, was a poor, thin substitute for his father, and he felt it. Somehow his liberty was gone, and his responsibility was increased. He had no longer any right to live in fantasy. He must be really something or other : he did not know what : a sailor or a husband or a father. He must look ahead and face the fact that, no matter how you hid away, people died and were born and fell in love, and that these things made a difference and produced great changes. O, very great changes indeed !

Robin had a gold watch which had once been his father's, but his mother had taken it away from his father and given it to him when he became the—er—head of the family, the eldest son of the eldest son of the eldest son. It seemed to him now that he had been wrong to take, or at any rate to wear the watch while his father was alive. He ought to have waited until he was dead—dead! What a terrible word! It made him jump and go cold and sick, because the word and the thing were all the more terrible when they came at the end of a long, long series of trivialities dribbling along.

"I could have been . . ." muttered Robin; but now he would not think of what might have been. This room was his father's, and his father had gone out upon some mad passionate errand. God knew what the old man's life was or where it lay. It was, at any rate, full. So much was certain, all of it, as full as Robin's was when he smelt the sea, even though it might only be the dirty ditch of the Mersey at Liverpool, where the great proud ships lay up so restively in their nostalgia like his own, for the wide ocean with never a speck of land, never a sister ship and hardly a star. . . . He thought enviously of the old man's journey to America.

"He has had that," he thought, "and it has meant nothing to him, for he could come back here and sit still here by this very fire and play with children."

He could not bear the dining-room any more. It belonged to his father and to Stephen, something stronger than himself, than his dreams, than his love for the sea. He hurried back to Catherine's room, that bower of bric-à-brac, more and more littered and crowded year after year with his own rubbish from Paris, Mark's from London, Phoebe's from Switzerland (O! that chalet in its glass-case!) and his mother's from Harrogate, Buxton, Cheltenham, Bath,—places for gout and gossip and

generals. He stumbled over a cat, and with a vicious kick lifted it into the middle of the aspidistras.

"Robin!" squeaked Catherine.

"I am sorry, Mamma," he said, "but I am at the end of my tether."

"What on earth do you mean?"

"What I say. You are not ill. I can talk to you. The less one says, the more one thinks, and I do not seem to have opened my mouth for years."

"Have you been talking to Tibby?"

"What on earth has Tibby to do with it? I am talking to you as your son and as the head of this—er—family."

"Be quiet."

"I will not be quiet. I want to tell you that if, as I think, my father has brought the last disgrace upon us by removing himself to the house of one of the disreputable females he frequents, I, for one, do not propose to stay here any longer or to endure what I have had to endure."

"Be quiet!"

"I will not be quiet. Phoebe and Mark can do as they please, but I intend to take you away from this house with its abominable associations. We will take rooms at first, then a little house at Deal where the sea and ships, all the ships in the world,—er—er—I mean. I could earn my living by the sea——"

"How?"

"There are dozens of ways."

"But I don't want to move. I like this house. All my life has been spent in this house. Don't ever talk such romantic nonsense to me again! There is no place in the world like Thrigsby. I have spent all my life in Thrigsby, and I intend to die in it."

"O!" Poor Robin had not thought of it like that. He had thought of her as a martyr, but she had spoken of her life with an immense gusto, as though it were unique and thrilling in its importance. He could only say feebly:

"I beg your pardon. I thought you always took the greatest interest in my voyages. I have often thought what an admirable wife you would have made for a sailor."

"Then you are a fool."

"I suppose I am," he said meekly ; and while Catherine went through the ceremony of lighting the lamp, he went away to fetch his deck-chair and Brassey's Log of the *Sunbeam*, a work which he knew from cover to cover. He was not allowed to read it for long. Catherine said :

"You are not to *give* that money to Bennett."

"No."

"He is to pay you back with interest, two pound ten shillings a month, which he is to bring here himself on the first Saturday of the month."

"To you ?"

"To me."

"It isn't you who are lending him the money."

"I am his mother. He must be made to feel his position, or with that flighty wife of his there would be the same trouble again."

"I see."

"You don't wish, I suppose, to support your brother *and* his wife, *and* his innumerable children ?"

"No. I don't wish to discuss it either."

"Don't be impertinent."

"Have you told Mark ?"

"Mark entirely agrees with me."

"And Phoebe ?"

"Phoebe is writing to your uncles and your aunt to warn them that we have assumed entire responsibility and that they need pay no attention to any appeals that may be made to them."

Robin was moved to protest.

"I have been through this before over your father's difficulties," said Catherine. "I wish these people to know that I can and will fight for my own."

She got up, drew her shawl round her, and, nursing her capacious jet-clad bosom in her plump arms, began slowly to move up and down the room.

"Here!" she snorted, "Annette is breaking her neck to take Bennett away from Thrigsby, and to go jigging all over the country like her brothers and sisters. Vagabonds!"

"Perhaps she doesn't like Thrigsby," suggested Robin.

"Then she should not have married a Lawrie."

This was so obviously intended to be unanswerable that Robin made no attempt to answer it.

Mark slid in just then and stood looking rather foolishly abashed in face of the combustion in the atmosphere.

"Bennett came to see me to-day," he said. "Annette is very sorry about Stephen and wants to bring him over and beg your pardon."

Catherine grunted triumphantly.

"That child would have been in his grave if we had not looked after him," she said. "The way she neglects her children is shameful."

"For God's sake leave Annette alone," grumped Robin. "If she apologises that is all you want, and I don't know how any mother could stand her boy being taken to a brothel."

"Disgusting!" cried Catherine. "How dare you say such a thing?"

"I was only referring to what everybody knows about this Miss or Mrs. Meekin."

"I won't have that woman's name mentioned in this house."

"Then if you don't want the old man to die in her arms, you'll stop this Hell that has broken loose, and let us be civil to him when he comes back,—if he ever does."

"Tibby said emphatically that he was not there."

"I expect he has gone to Scotland," said Mark. "It

would be just like him to go and weep over Burns' grave before he dies."

"Why do you talk about his dying?" asked Catherine wildly. "Why do you talk about his dying? He is not going to die."

"Everyone of us is going to die sooner or later," said Mark, gloomily laying out the cards and the cribbage board. "We all feel that something is going to happen. Nothing else can happen—unless it's Tibby and Stephen, or you Robin, or perhaps it is only the cat going to have kittens."

"I won't play with you to-night, if you talk like that."

"Very well then," said Mark icily, "I shall play patience. Do you prefer Demon or Miss Milligan?"

Catherine made no reply. She walked to and fro a little faster, tormented by the idea that Jamie was going to die, as though it were some last escapade the consequences of which she could neither foresee nor understand. These two sons of hers were good sons and had stood between her and her tormentor, but even they had not been able to prevent life going on unintelligibly beyond her control in Bennett's household, nor in Jamie's, in that wild brain of his or that stormy illimitable soul that moved in him and was like the sea in which poor Robin's wits were drowned.

The last post brought a relief from the strain that was upon them all in a form of a note from Miss Lawrie announcing her arrival at Cheadley Edge, and her intention of calling with Tom and Agnes. Catherine scented interference and was instantly defiant. She did not at first divulge the contents of the letter but at last could not contain them any longer.

Mark shifted the Knave of Hearts to the Queen of Clubs to release a ten and said:

"Perhaps it is she who is going to die. But people

never do die when you want to know what is in their will. Look at Aunt Hannah! She was ninety-six and then she had only two hundred pounds although she drew a pension for fifty years. It beats me what some of these old women do with their money."

"Drink," said Robin from the depths of Brassey. Mark chuckled behind his moustache and as near a smile as possible flitted across his faceless countenance.

"Tom and Agnes," muttered Catherine, her suspicions racing. "It is years since they have been in this house. God punished him in making her childless."

"An iceberg," interjected Mark. "I'd as soon be married to an iceberg if I were a woman. Which God forbid I should ever be. I don't think God worries much about punishment. Everybody is punished in his character. There's always a kink somewhere that prevents your being what you want to be."

Mark was only talking for the sake of talking. He had a deep, hollowly resonant voice with which he knew from experience he could drown and subdue these agitations that periodically arose.

"If they come, they come, but it does not mean that there is going to be any difference or that I am going to let any of these Lawries' interfere with me or my children."

"We are no longer children," ejaculated Robin, "and that is precisely what Annette says about you."

"Annette is different," cried Catherine, and she abruptly left the room.

The two brothers sat in silence for a long time. They had never much to say to each other and had very little in common. At last Mark said:

"Did you ever think of getting married, Robin?"

"Who would have me with my infirmities and my responsibilities?"

"O! women aren't particular. . . I mean, have you ever thought of bringing a wife home to this house?"

“ Good God ! No ! ”

“ I have. I think one of us ought to have done it just to see what happened. Set a woman to catch a woman.”

“ Annette hasn’t made much difference.”

“ Hasn’t she ? ” said Mark. “ I think Annette has won.”

He subsided into his game, not a gleam of intelligence in his face, not a tremor of feeling in his stiff figure. Only his moustache bristled with a kind of alert, cat-like excitement.

The second silence was longer than the first, and again it was Mark who broke it.

“ Do you realise that there are a hundred thousand houses in Thrigsby in which people are playing cribbage and back-gammon and patience, and wondering what the Hell they are going to do with the tiresome old women ? I do. . . Do you blame any man for taking to drink ? I don’t. . Do you realise that there are hundreds and thousands of men and women waiting for their uncles and aunts to die and leave them money, and doing nothing else, a whole generation doing nothing else ? I do. . . ”

“ O ! Shut up, and let me read,” snapped Robin.

“ I don’t often say what I think,” said Mark. “ You might as well listen, for I am going on saying it. I think it is interesting. I want to know what our nephews and nieces are going to do when we have spent the money which we have done nothing to earn, for we shall leave them nothing else—no faith, or philosophy or thought, or anything to remember us by. We shall be just a kind of blur, a fog of mindlessness getting in their way. It seems to me too bad. One wants something else in life besides a lot of habits.”

“ You’re not thinking of getting married, are you ? ”

“ No, I’m not. And if I were, I should do it like

Bennett, without saying a word to any of you. A family like this, or any family for that matter, is dangerous. The family, my dear brother, is *in articulo mortis*—*Timor mortis conturbat me*, and the old lunatic is not the *only* man in Thrigsby who reads and understands poetry. . . . I think that's all. . . . O! about Bennett. If the old beast makes him pay up, I shall refund whatever sum she exacts out of my own pocket—to Annette."

CHAPTER XVIII

HIS SOUL GOES MARCHING ON

ANNETTE received Jamie's telegram in the midst of a wavering perplexity as to the best means of doing what she had undertaken to do. It was one thing to give a promise when Bennett was tender and loverly—another to carry it out, and she had, none the less for her apparent surrender, a deep sense of the importance of whatever was happening. Bennett seemed not to feel that at all. He was never greatly concerned with the implications of what he did. The Jew, Gordon, had squeezed him to the very limit—the Jew, Gordon, was going to have his pound of flesh, with never a drop of blood spilled—that was the end of it. An episode was finished, and, fortified in his religion, refreshed with a deep draught of his wife's love, Bennett returned almost gladly to his routine, which, after all, provided for the problems of his home and left him free for his intimate and sweet and passionate pursuits, Annette, Father Smale, and the tart taste of the life of Thrigsby which he inhaled during his morning and evening walks. He was deeply satisfied and angrily resented anything which threatened to disturb that way of living, which seemed to him exactly to conform to the injunctions of the Bible, and also to feed, without excess, the wild instincts with which upon occasion he found himself thrilling. He could be priest and lord and king in his own house, and his children, with the exception of Stephen, could receive life as a sacrament at his hands.

He could impose ritual and ceremony upon them—with the exception of Stephen, whom he found unaccountably disturbing.

Annette saw and felt all that. Bennett's happiness was her first concern. He was in a sense, her first-born, her child long before Mordy came, and the immediate struggle between Bennett and Mordy had resulted in Stephen's being born in that curious, absent-spirited way, so that she had had a sense of being thrust aside by him, as by old Mr. Lawrie who had hovered over her just then and had played a deep part in the drama of her early years as a wife. . . Strange that; you knew perfectly well that something tremendous had happened, but you could not say exactly what. You just had to put up with results—at least she had, for, as far as she could make out, Bennett never took any notice of events or results, but was off on his frenzies and emotions, which gathered every now and then into a splendour which swept her off her feet. She did not complain. Bennett was like that—life was like that. If, in the upshot, Stephen was like a changeling, and she could not feel at her ease with or about him, very well then, his life would probably end as strangely as it had begun. She felt no responsibility for him, except in so far as he affected, as he so vitally did, the relationship between Bennett and his mother, which was the rock on which her first girlish hopes had split.

She had agreed to Stephen's return. She had not agreed to take him or to apologise. Why should she? Stephen was her own, but then again she felt that he was not her own. Her difficulty was none the less real for being indefinite and unexpressible. Stephen's return to Roman Street would be a relief to everybody. He upset the other children and Bennett and herself. He brought the shadow of Roman Street into the place. If he returned he would take its menace with him and

she could fill the others with her own happy Folyat gaiety, which could defy the very worst that life could do, and, in its capacity for making friends, was better than all the money the rich Lawries and all their Keiths and Greigs had hoarded.

At last she put her problem to Stephen himself :

"Do you want to go back to Roman Street ? "

"You want me to," he said, apparently taking no interest in the matter.

"But what do *you* want ? "

"Tibby wants me to."

"But *you*, what do *you* want, you tiresome child ? "

Stephen did not in the least understand her. He wanted nothing, did not know what it was to want anything. His body was full of life, his head of knowledge and dreams, his heart of affection. It did not matter to him where he was or whom he was with, or if he was alone. He could just be, indefinitely, but it was impossible to explain this, which was, or should have been obvious. Annette's insistence hurt him and he began to cry.

"O ! you water-works ! " she said. "You are too big to be a cry-baby."

"Nobody wants me here," he replied. He was stating a fact which to him was as obvious as his inevitable indifference to it.

"You like being with your grandfather, don't you ? "

She might as well have asked him if he liked breathing. That was what was so astonishing about these people. They made such a fuss about what they wanted and about their love. They were always writing sacred things up on fences. Love, Stephen knew, should be as inevitable as breathing or it is not love, but just a parade, a noise like the steam-organ outside a booth.

"You don't want to tell me what you want ? " Annette asked almost desperately.

"I don't know," replied Stephen. "It is nice at Miss Meekin's."

Annette went off into a shriek of laughter. There was no making or getting anything out of this solemn changeling. It was just as well, perhaps, that the Lawries' should take the responsibility of him off her hands, for he was, in a way, like the whole lot of them rolled into one, mysterious and deep, and with something smouldering in his eyes that made it impossible to laugh at him.

She put her arms round him and said :

"You'll never be a good man unless you love your mother."

"I do love you," he replied simply.

Jamie's telegram arrived just then and swept her back to her old sense of being somehow involved with the old man and the boy in some mysterious purpose, which now, however, had been fulfilled.

Yes, that was right. She would take the boy back to the old man, and if she could not avoid Catherine Lawrie, she would tell her to her face that she had brought the child to James Lawrie and not to her nor to the house. That was right. That was how it should be.

She knew that Catherine slept every afternoon between half-past two and four, and, in the hope of avoiding her, arrived at Roman Street at three to find a carriage and pair waiting outside the gates.

"O!" she said, "O! Callers!"

It was a finer carriage even than that in which Miss Lawrie and Mrs. Tom had called on her those years ago before the trouble began. She slipped with Stephen round to the back door and made her way to the kitchen, where she found Jamie, marvellously clean and handsome, with his hair and beard snow-white and glistening, sitting by the fire, smoking, thinking, nodding over his thoughts, with Tibby hungrily wondering at him, querulous and anxious. Stephen ran to him at once, and a pang

shot through Annette to see them together, each blissfully content with the other's nearness.

"That's my boy," said Jamie.

"Did you come back in the train?" asked Stephen.

"Aye," said Jamie. "Cold and hungry and full of triumph."

"Triumph!" Stephen seemed to share it at once, and Annette felt that Tibby and she were thrust out into another world. . . O! well, there was something here that she could not understand, though it removed her perplexity and made her feel a wonderful new contentment with regard to Stephen.

"My child," Jamie said, turning to Annette, "we've caused a stir-about. Here's my grand brother and my grander sister come to see what's to do. Shall we let them know that Stephen is at the bottom of it? Eh? My sister gave me money for new clothes, but Stephen wants them more than I. She gave me money for the Jew, but Tibby tells me it is paid already. We can't allow that, can we? . . Come with me, child, we'll see this through."

Child! Annette thought she was a child indeed, helpless and happy compared with this old man, who looked so thin and worn, and yet was so rich in power and authority, that all her words and all her thoughts were reduced to less than nothing. She could only give him her gay, friendly smile, though she was stabbed to her very heart with pity to see such pride shining through his long humiliation. He to be going from the kitchen to the room so littered with the trumpery evidence of his long exile!

They had not moved however before the door opened and Miss Lawrie appeared, an odd benignant little figure, her quick eyes taking in the scene, the shabby kitchen, Tibby's tall gauntness, her brother's splendid dignity, little blithe Annette wanting to run away because these

Lawries were so poignant, so disturbing in their dramatic intensity.

"I left Tom and Agnes and Catherine talking," said Miss Lawrie. "You've moved the lot of us at last, Jamie."

"Thank God for that!" came from Tibby in a strange, hysterical voice, and she hobbled into the scullery and shut the door.

"This is your boy, Jamie?" asked Miss Lawrie.

"Aye," said Jamie, "that's my boy."

Stephen advanced shyly and shook hands. Miss Lawrie stooped and kissed him. Her lips and cheek were curiously but beautifully cold, so that he started into a sudden ecstasy. Here was someone who knew that love was as inevitable as breathing, someone with whom he could be happy.

"My sister," said Jamie, "is a traveller and something of a she-philosopher. She has a house which, though she did not know it at the time, was built for Stephen."

"Stephen and other boys," corrected Miss Lawrie gently.

Annette wished she could slip away like Tibby. Jamie's shabbiness made the scene unbearable, with his pride, happiness and elation. Poor feeble wretch! How ill he looked, how burned up with the flames of what his vision made of this day of reconciliation.

"O!" thought Annette, "I'm stupid and frivolous and shallow."

If only she could steal away to Tibby she could cry, but with these others she had to be disciplined and taut, and do her best to bear the pressure of the passions of these people, knit and locked together, to find whatever strange and deeply-hidden thing it was they sought. Bennett could be like that too—suddenly too deep for her, caught up in some raging inner conflict or some thrilling purpose known only to himself and whatever

power it was that he found in religion or his life out in the town—a thing apart from her, a need, a desire, that neither she nor any other woman could satisfy. They were like people challenged, or looking for a challenge, like the people in the Bible, like Moses on the mountain, or like Moses with his eyes burned out from staring into the burning bush. Yes. They all had the same eyes. Stephen had them too—eyes burned out with staring—staring inwards.

“We’ll make your peace with Catherine, eh, Annette?” chuckled Jamie. “Come along. We hold Stephen as a hostage for your good behaviour—or we think we do. We think we do. We English are content with that.”

“Too bad, Jamie,” said Miss Lawrie. “They don’t understand our humour.”

“That’s true,” said Jamie. “We descend among the English and declare they are the world’s best joke. No wonder they deny us humour.”

He took Stephen’s hand, and, followed by Annette and Miss Lawrie, they passed down the long dark passage leading from the kitchen to the bric-à-brac bower from which Jamie had been banished this many a long year.

Annette was baffled. There was no food here for her sense of the ridiculous. Too much was involved, and she was overcome by a conviction that she would have to fight for her life and yet could move neither hand nor foot, neither heart nor tongue. Her share in whatever was forthcoming was automatic. She was an instrument not an agent.

It was curious, too, to feel that she and Miss Lawrie were caught up in the wake of Jamie and Stephen, who, although they were moving at the usual plodding pace, seemed to be possessed of a comet-like velocity. But she had always felt and thought queerly in that house.

She wished Tom were not there. She had always been afraid of him, the grim old ghost of a man who could

blankly ignore the existence of everything that he was incapable of feeling.

What was going to happen? There had been terrible scenes when Jamie had entered that room, as now, unbidden.

Jamie opened the door and stood just inside it, drawing himself to his full height, looking taller and grander than ever, though age and suffering had robbed him of several inches.

Annette choked as she watched the remarkable scene that followed in silence, filling the silence with a tense cold but wonderful misery that turned the four, Jamie and Tom, Catherine and Agnes, into carven figures, opposed in pairs with a contrast so vivid and powerful that Annette felt that as long as she lived she would never see, never remember anything else. Agnes rose from her chair in her frail faded prettiness, her little, helpless, useless hands held out towards Jamie, who, tightly clasping Stephen by the hand, seemed to confront and rebuke her and to say without words, though none the less clearly for that, "This is the child of love we should have had." Agnes, with her helpless hands, pleaded with him and yearned towards him, and a great tenderness came into being between the wrecked old man and the helpless old woman, while across it Tom and Catherine, rising too, confronted each other and glared at each other like wild beasts, like tigers at bay.

At last Jamie broke the tension with a low, gentle laugh and said:

"Empire is no more, and the lion and wolf shall cease. How are you, Agnes? How do, Tom. Glad you have come to see us at last."

He moved over to the fire-place and stood with his hand thrust into the front of his thread-bare frock-coat. The others sank into their chairs. Annette and Miss Lawrie stood by the door, while Stephen crept over towards

Tom and stared at him in his absorbed way as though he were puzzled what to do with such a man who defied both love and mimicry.

Addressing himself to Catherine, Jamie said :

" I sent for Annette and Stephen this morning because I thought it high time we ceased to be at cross-purposes. There is no room for argument. My sister and I are at one in this matter. What is left of me is still and has never ceased to be the head of this family, and I do not choose that it should participate in the modern system of usury, which has eaten the heart out of our lives and the institutions by which we live them. A few days ago, my sister, who has been my life-long companion, made me a free gift of three hundred pounds. That gift I wish, in the presence of you all here assembled, to hand on to my dear daughter-in-law, Annette, for whose courage and spirit I have an admiration which would remain unexpressed were the gift a hundred thousand times as great. Three hundred pounds, Annette, three hundred pounds——"

He fumbled in his pocket. His face fell. Agnes burst into tears. He threw up his hands, laughed, and said :

" Robbed ! Robbed !—I had—I went——"

A grim sneer settled on Tom's face as he turned to Miss Lawrie. Catherine's eyes bulged and her mouth opened in horror. What she wanted to say, what Tom wanted to say was too awful to be said.

" This will please you, Tom," said Jamie quickly. " I look a damned fool to the end. I had the money in the train. I had it——"

" Ha ! " said Tom. " Ha ! "

" It doesn't matter," said Annette. " It doesn't matter."

" Doesn't matter ! " roared Catherine. " Three hundred pounds doesn't matter ! Now you know what I have suffered all my life ! Talk, and talk and no money at the end of it."

"Be quiet, woman," growled Jamie. "If that money is where I think it is, you shall have it in half an hour."

Ach! These people, who thought they could cover up the deep truth, the deep love that had been brought to light with money and their rage for money, their mean, creeping spirit of usury.

"If I say it doesn't matter," said Miss Lawrie quickly, "then it doesn't matter, since it is my money that is lost."

"Come, Stephen," said Jamie, "we'll find it."

But Stephen did not hear him. He was spell-bound by the expressions that crossed Tom's face as the Guardian of the Poor realised his helplessness in the ruin of all the pretences of his life. They were all against him, him, the Guardian of the Poor, the Chairman of Committees, the author of a pamphlet on Municipal Economy—all these women were against him, while this mountebank, this tatterdermalion did as he pleased with them.

"Don't stare at me, boy," he snapped.

Jamie turned, took in the situation, and, with a merry laugh said:

"Hold him, Stephen!"

At the door he kissed Annette and his sister and said to them:

"You two are together, anyway,"

With that he left them, and, hatless, with his long white hair and beard streaming in the wind, he slipped down the path to the gate, saw the carriage and pair, jumped into it and directed the driver to Miss Meekin's, for all the world, as he thought with a chuckle, like a rich Thrigsby banker visiting his mistress.

The butcher and the grocer turned out to stare at him and Jamie lolled in the carriage, enjoying himself and the joke, and the feeling that he was near the end. Near the end, because he could hardly see, and there was a burning heat in his chest, a choking at his throat. Miss Meekin was out, and there was only a small girl in

the shop. He knew, however, that when she put his money by for him she hid it in the tea caddy. . . Aye, there it was. Three hundred pounds and forty pounds besides, and odd sixpences and pennies. The good old bawd, who had washed him and made him decent for his death. Queer how you could go on when you had nothing but your will to support you! Three hundred pounds! Freedom and release for Annette, freedom for his boy, deliverance from usury and the slinking, creeping hypocrisy of the stucco house, the family, and hard old Tom, malignant, fortune-hunting, investment-nosing Tom. . . . Heh! Stephen, there's a work to do! I've found a way! Here, boy, in the heart is a way! Follow it, follow it. . . !

He tottered back to the carriage and said to the amazed driver, with a splendid wave of his hand, like that of a Thrigsby banker leaving his mistress :

“Home.”

The splendid horses clattered and cloppered over the setted streets, and Jamie, faintly hearing them as he sank back on the cushions, whispered to himself :

“Loosing the eternal horses from their dens. . . Stephen, boy—Stephen, boy. Pretty, pretty robin, near my bosom.”

The carriage stopped outside the curly gates of the stucco house. The driver waited. He saw an old wrinkled face appear in the window above the porch, and a fat old woman's face peer above the ferns and aspidistras in the parlour window. He saw the front door open and a small boy come sobbing and running down the asphalt path. The small boy climbed into the carriage, and with a piercing howl, flung himself across the body of the strange old man.

The driver, descending, removed his hat, for he saw that the strange old man was dead.

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By HORACE ANNESLEY VACHELL

Author of "Quinneys," "The House of Peril," etc.

This story concerns two husbands who, rather bored with life, agree to go off together on a walking tour in Normandy. They do not tell their wives where they are going, but their better halves, being very modern women, put their heads together and resolve to follow their husbands and punish them for walking off in this cavalier manner.

The story tells of the punishment meted out to the wanderers and of embarrassing circumstances under which one of the wives finds herself in company with the husband of the other.

Sowing Seeds in Danny By NELLIE L. McCLUNG

Author of "The Second Chance," "Purple Springs," etc.

Pearl Watson, a delightfully human Irish-Canadian girl, has already been introduced to more than 20,000 readers in the Dominion as the heroine of "Purple Springs," and the enchantment of her love affair, which interested the government of an entire province, will be felt in the same degree when reading the bright, characteristic incidents of Canadian life and of the wonderfully realistic influence which this girl has on the several characters with whom she is in contact.

Lovers of humour, incident, and the brighter side of life will agree that "Sowing Seeds in Danny" is a great Canadian novel.

Anybody's Husband

By MRS. HORACE TREMLETT

Author of "Platonic Peter," "A Knight in Paris," etc.

Colonel Sir Rupert Allison, having resolved to marry in order to get himself an heir more to his taste than his nephew, Dick, falls in love with the niece of Lady Mora, a widow who loves him herself. But Dick and the girl, Floris, are secretly married, and it is only when Floris hears of Dick's death in Africa that she reveals the secret to Sir Rupert, who then marries her. How Dick turns up alive and how Sir Rupert leaves the way clear for the young pair are dramatic incidents of a clever, amusing comedy full of piquant situations and sparkling dialogue.

Annette and Bennett

By GILBERT CANNAN

Author of "Pugs and Peacocks," "Sembal," etc.

Dealing with the industrial revolution in England, this intense drama of the Stucco House brings together all the threads of the history of a family dominated by its most despised and contemned member and compelled in the end to turn from the emptiness of material success to the spiritual store amassed through his obstinate failure. James Lawrie is never so splendidly himself as when he is making a perfect fool of himself, and it is when he is most comically in misery that he most boldly trails his cloud of glory.

The Honest Man

By UNA L. SILBERRAD

Author of "Green Pastures," etc.

The scene of Miss Silberrad's new novel is laid partly in London and partly in Kendal and the moor country that lies on the border of Westmorland and Yorkshire. It is the story of how a sober middle-aged citizen of the seventeenth century came into a fortune and found romance; and of the unexpected things that happened as a result of this change in his circumstances. There is a very charming love interest in the story, as one would expect from the author of "Green Pastures" and "Sampson Rideout—Quaker."

The Way of the World By M. MORGAN GIBBON

Author of "Helen Marsden," "The Pharisees."

The story of a detached girl of to-day, who is wooed by many men, but cares only for Hervey, whose mother, Lady Hannay, opposes the marriage. A ne'er-do-well son of the Manor near which she lives commits a burglary and is shot by his own brother, one of her lovers, who then shoots himself. When the attentions of her many wooers have been diverted from her by various circumstances, she eventually marries Hervey.

A Remarkable First Novel.

The Box of Spikenard

By MRS. RAYMOND BOILEAU

The central theme of this remarkable book is the fluctuating relationship of a husband of high gifts, whose first motive—he is a soldier—is devotion to duty; and his wife, who loves him, and, for the first few years, is completely dominated by him. She is a character of great fundamental goodness and considerable charm, with streaks of Celtic imagination and playful devilry. Both characters live as individuals, but they also embody the universal and fundamental differences which bring about misunderstanding between men of action and women in love. As a study of this position the book is of great interest, and the delineation is penetrating and almost fiercely sincere. It contains many tragic passages, especially the deliberate death of the wife's brother, but the end is happy. The characters are each in their own way delightful.

Hutchinson's New Novels. 7/6 Net

Rooted Up

By DOROTHEA CONYERS

Author of "The Strayings of Sandy," etc.

The story of a wild Irishman who, when his home is burnt, goes to England to live with an uncle, and there retrieves his fallen fortunes. The English girl, whom he loves, objects to his wild ways.

The Whispering City

By GABRIELLE VALLINGS

Author of "Bindweed," "Tumult," etc.

The romance of a young Englishman who goes to a little semi-obliterated Spanish port, in the hope of unravelling the threads of a mystery connected with his father's youth. The scene is laid against a background of picturesque local colour and descriptions of Spanish life in a place of which it has been written: "The Moor left his heart's blood to beat perpetually under the Spanish skin." Hence it is a whispering city, a place of ghosts, a Spanish mistress for ever sighing for her Moorish lover—a city in which the serenade of the passionate lover is never silent.

There is a very strong love interest and a modern study of the occult.

What the Blounts Did

By LADY KING-HALL

Author of "An Engagement."

Readers who enjoyed Lady King-Hall's previous novel will find added charms in its successor, which tells of a supposed poor relation from Australia, in reality a millionaire seeking an heir, snubbed by Lady Blount, who thinks him poor and unworthy of acknowledgment. Natural charm characterises the story of the man's quest and its happy result.

Minuet and Fox-Trot

By AGNES AND EGERTON CASTLE

A thrilling, kaleidoscopic collection which reveals more than ever the versatility and mastery of the art of short-story writing possessed by these famous authors.

Love in a Pit Village

By LADY MUIR MACKENZIE

Author of "Kate's Comedy of Tears," etc.

A story of great human interest, with the characters of three principal women drawn with conviction. The vicissitudes of Belinda, the unmarried mother of the pit doctor's son, are wonderfully real and well portrayed.

Captain Blood

By RAFAEL SABATINI

Author of "Scaramouche," "The Trampling of the Lilies," etc.

From the logs and diaries of Jeremiah Pitt—which Mr. Sabatini claims to have discovered—the romantic story of Captain Peter Blood has been mainly reconstructed.

Sir Henry Morgan, most celebrated of all the buccaneer leaders, had an able chronicler in the person of the Dutchman Esquemeling, who sailed with him. What Esquemeling did for Morgan, Jeremiah Pitt has done for Captain Blood.

The career of Blood, a cultured man driven by the malignity of Fate to indulge an inborn appetite for adventure, is an Odyssey set aglow by the great love which kept him honourable amid dishonour.

A White Man By MRS. FRANCES EVERARD

Author of "A Daughter of the Sand."

The true ring which characterised "A Daughter of the Sand" from start to finish is not missing from Mrs. Frances Everard's second novel, which is as powerful as its predecessor, and, incidentally, has also a Northern African setting.

This "romance of the East" recounts the adventures of a young, beautiful orphan, Madeleine, who shares a legacy with her artist friend, Lorette. The two set off to find the glow and glamour of the East, after Madeleine has refused Jim Weston, a rising young Press man, whom she really loves, but will not admit the fact. After meeting Jim again, Madeleine marries a Frenchman but hardly is the wedding reception begun before an Arab produces proofs that this man's mother was an Arab, and that, although he is white, his brother, who died, was black.

Maurice, the husband, horror-struck, knows that he can never let Madeleine live with him as his wife, nor make her the mother of half-castes. Maurice is killed in battle against Arabs.

Ample excitement and a satisfactory ending are keynotes of this story.

The Flying Fifty-Five By EDGAR WALLACE

Author of "The Secret House," "The Fighting Scouts," etc.

The Earl of Fontwell, a wealthy young nobleman, undertakes for a bet to walk to Scotland and back in a given time, with only a shilling in his pocket. Nearing home on his return journey, he is seen by pretty Stella Barrington, who trains the racehorses which her father has left her, and because of his unkempt and ragged appearance is mistaken by her for a tramp. In pity she offers to give him work in her stable, and the sporting young nobleman accepts the offer.

Thereafter he is able to frustrate the plans of an unscrupulous enemy of hers and train and ride "The Flying Fifty-Five" for the Derby.

Hutchinson's New Novels. 7/6 Net

Worlds Apart

By M. P. WILLCOCKS

Author of "The Sleeping Partner," "The Keystone," etc.

Two widely divergent characters, one a supreme but lovable egoist, the other an idealist who has never been able to live happily without sharing to the full the joys and sorrows of a troubled and chaotic time, are held in balance.

Middle-aged, these two magnetic figures find the real challenge to their several ways of life thrown down by the younger generation, determined, active men from the war, whose fate is in the hands of circumstances, the influence of which was at work before they were born.

The story is one of heredity, hidden, transformed, but never eliminated. There are tragic moments, but the tone is one of humour. Lydia Wyatt is a Mrs. Proudie without the shrewishness, a woman who shapes other people's lives with results that are especially disconcerting to herself.

Alas, that Spring—!

By ELINOR MORDAUNT

Author of "The Little Soul," "Laura Creighton," etc.

This is entirely a novel of youth. The scene is laid in Ireland before the war, the story opening when Lord Shaen, the hero, a happy-go-lucky Etonian, is sixteen, and the heroine, Henrietta Rorke, thirteen years of age. It is late afternoon when Shaen arrives to say good-bye to Henrietta on his parents taking him to the West Indies, and in her passionate desire to prove her love for him Henrietta gives in to his entreaties to camp in a cave upon the mountain-side with him for that one night, passionately innocent as a child. Gossip and a hurried marriage result.

Two years of happiness pass, until Lord Shaen becomes entangled with an actress, and Henrietta, broken-hearted, drowns herself in a mountain lake.

The story ends with young Shaen, realising his loss, weeping with his head in the lap of the woman by whom he was infatuated.

Makeshifts

By MARGARET BAILLIE-SAUNDERS

Author of "The Mayoress's Wooing," etc.

How a woman in love lets a strange man suffer to save her own happiness, and then offers herself sacrificially to redeem him, gives this novel its title.

By a sudden tide of very curious circumstances a Welsh draper's daughter in the Midlands, Myfanwy Rhos, has the whole public reputation of a famous priest placed in her hands. He is publicly accused, and by a word she can save him.

It is timely and topical, and will be widely read, the more so because its subject is dealt with sympathetically and without rancour from one who writes of Church matters from the inside. This is what is called a strong novel of human passion and spiritual struggle, but it is presented with vivacity and colour, and never for a moment loses its "go" and interest.

Heartbeat

By STACY AUMONIER

Author of "The Love-a-Duck," "One After Another," etc.

This novel concerns the life of an extremely interesting and emotional girl of strange parentage. One observes the influence upon her character and development by the forces of heredity and environment. Her father was a Chancellor of the Exchequer, her mother an obscure actress. On her father's death she herself plunges into theatrical life, of which we have many vivid pictures. Her spiritual development is drawn with the inevitable certainty of Greek drama. One foresees the outcome, but the interest in the "Heartbeat" is the interest which colours all human emotions and relationships. Barbara Powerscourt is an intensely human modern type, swayed by innate weaknesses and complexities, but nevertheless capable of a sublime self-sacrifice.

Partners of Chance

By H. H. KNIBBS

A tale of Arizona, of men who lived a rough-and-tumble life out there on the highly-coloured deserts, under the shadows of the painted mesas. It is a story rich with the tang of the country, and happy in the author's choice of characters. "Little Jim" Hastings and his father, "Big Jim," pals by force of circumstance; "Panhandle" Sears, "Big Jim's" enemy; Bartley, an author and gentleman; "Cheyenne," tramp-rider and cowboy poet—all are fascinating types of diverse human nature, and in the deft hands of Mr. Knibbs they take on the vitality and individuality of living men and women.

The Million-Dollar Suitcase

By ALICE MacGOWAN and PERRY NEWBERRY

A keen, satisfying, well-written mystery story with distinctly novel features of situation and development which will appeal to all lovers of a good detective yarn.

Suppose a clever man had planned for six years a discovery-proof crime that was to lay open to him his heart's desires, and when he had committed it, found it unexpectedly but inevitably involved the perpetration of a second and more dangerous crime, detection in which would mean ruin? Would he dare the second crime? And could he, on short notice, devise a plan for getting it accomplished, so diabolically crafty as to defy detection and further complicate discovery of the first crime?

Revolving Fates

By ESSEX SMITH

Author of "Shepherdless Sheep"

A singularly powerful story of love and intrigue, involving an unusual plot. The principal characters belong to a family that for centuries has remained tied to ancestral lands. Intense human interest characterises the story. The love of a brother and sister is all but wrecked when they discover their father's infidelity.

Hutchinson's New Novels. 7/6 Net

The Kingmakers By BURTON E. STEVENSON

Author of "Little Comrade" (54th Thousand).

A thrilling, modern romance of a throne and the intrigue that surrounded it. A famous journalist, whose extraordinary adventures play a leading part in the story, is dragged into the whirlpool of intrigue, passion, and devotion, with results as exciting to the reader as everyone concerned in this fight for a throne.

The Gazebo By BARONESS VON HUTTEN

Author of "Pam," "The Lordship of Love," etc.

The particular gazebo which gives the name to this book is a windowed balcony overlooking the village street, in the country home of Peg Doria, a well-known novelist who befriends Jenny Mayes, a clever, but half-educated, middle-class London girl.

Peg Doria has seen nothing of her husband for ten years and is not displeased by the attentions of Sir Dominick Audley, a widower of fifty. But Sir Dominick, in her absence, is accepted by Jenny, and Peg Doria is fiercely jealous.

It is from the gazebo that Jenny overhears a conversation from which she gathers that her suitor and Mrs. Doria care for each other; and from the gazebo, too, Mrs. Doria looks down on her derelict husband, who vainly tries to create a scandal in the village.

John Edgar's Angels By WINIFRED GRAHAM

Author of "Breakers on the Sand," "The Daughter Terrible,"

"Falling Waters," etc.

Winifred Graham's new novel deals with the love of a man for two women, one a Society beauty, the other the piquante daughter of a prosperous grocer. The character of the hero, John Edgar, is a curious mixture of Puritanical idealism and fiery passion. His unhappy childhood is a striking contrast to his subsequent career, when, in new and bewildering Society, he meets the beautiful daughter of Lord Porthminster. Through the ramifications of a plot that seems more like real life than fiction, one wonders whether John Edgar's story is not a human document lightly disguised.

The Inheritance of Jean Trouvé

By NEVIL HENSHAW

Author of "Aline of the Grand Woods," etc.

Jean Trouvé is disinherited by his grandfather and turned adrift poor and friendless in a strange land. But the blood in the boy's veins is an inheritance with which the grandfather does not reckon—character, courage, and a love of the soil.

Mr. Henshaw has written a novel which appeals to all who appreciate beauty and value truth; who prefer to associate with worthy characters worthily portrayed; and who are moved by the authentic reflections of the pathos of life.

The Great Roxhythe By GEORGETTE HEYER

Author of "The Black Moth: A Romance of the Eighteenth Century."

This book is notable for the delightful portrait which it contains of Charles II. The unscrupulousness of the monarch is patent, yet one is made to feel his amazing charm, his wit, whimsicality, and good humour. Like master like man, the Marquis of Roxhythe is ruthless where the interests of Charles are concerned. Through the intrigues of the reign he moves, a romantic figure, elegant, supercilious, dominating every situation. Attached to Roxhythe as his secretary, and captivated by the spell of his engaging personality, is young Christopher Dart, who would be loyal to King and Country both. But the two were not compatible under the Merry Monarch; hence the theme and sub-title of the book: "Under which king, Bezonian?" Christopher, assailed by doubts, is torn by his love for Roxhythe, whose devotion to Charles is absolute, unswerving, and entirely without scruple. Withal, "the great Roxhythe," in spite of his ruthlessness, compels the fascination of the reader by the sheer force of his magnetic personality

The Red Vulture By FREDERICK SLEATH

Author of "Sniper Jackson," "A Breaker of Ships," etc.

"The Red Vulture" is a thrilling story of the criminal adventures of a young gentleman whose career as a burglar is unknown to anyone. While making an entry through a cellar wall into a house where he believes jewels are to be found, he is amazed by the sight of what appears to be a gorgeously equipped Eastern temple—actually the headquarters of a murderous secret society. He recognises the principal dancing girl as one he had loved before he was dismissed the Service for embezzlement. His breaking up the gang, his love for the sister of Clara, who poisons herself, and the clearing of his character, all provide sustained and thrilling entertainment.

The Fool of Destiny By ROLF BENNETT
and KATHERINE HARRINGTON

Shipwrecked, Jimmy Noble, an actor, is adrift in a small boat with Ferris, a stoker, who, under a mask of grime, is Noble's double. Ferris loves Aida Clavering, who is engaged to Noble, her colleague in musical comedy. Noble is picked up and Ferris, apparently dead, is left in the boat, after Noble has taken from his body a belt of valuable pearls, in accordance with a solemn pact they have made. Saved in the end, Ferris believes he has been victimised by Noble, who, with Aida, is now on the London stage. Noble, drugged by a dope fiend, is found by Ferris, who assumes his identity and is on the point of marrying Aida. The characters are thoroughly alive, and the interest is sustained to a satisfactory conclusion. The dope man is murdered.

Hutchinson's New Novels: 7/6 Net

Manetta's Marriage

By G. B. BURGIN

Author of "The Shutters of Silence," "Uncle Jeremy," etc

This is Mr. Burgin's sixty-sixth novel.

Adonais Millette, a young Canadian poet, is married to the impetuous, passionate Seraphine Daoust, who is drinking herself to death and, through her unreasoning jealousy, makes his life a hell. He "puts out" for England, meets the beautiful Manetta, and the jealous Seraphine, hearing of this, pretends to be dead in order to entrap him into a bigamous marriage with Manetta, who is the illegitimate child of a wealthy old antiquarian. The story tells how Seraphine's plan succeeds, of her claiming Adonais, and his parting with Manetta until . . .

But we must not "give away" Mr. Burgin's plot. Suffice it to say that "Manetta's Marriage" is one of the most absorbing and exciting, pathetic and yet humorous, stories he has ever written, which will grasp the reader's attention from start to finish. The character of Manetta is a wonderful study of a beautiful, loving and resourceful woman when confronted with a disaster which threatens to shatter her happiness.

Average Cabins

By ISABEL C. CLARKE

Author of "Lady Trent's Daughter," "Tressider's Sister," etc.

The absorbing love-story of a woman who, until she is thirty-five, is bound hand and foot to her mother's authority. The hero, Denis Lorimer, a Catholic, six years her junior, is an old friend of her brother, Father John Ponsford, and was guilty of embezzlement before the story opens. The setting of the early chapters is in Italy, where Denis has to fight a duel with the brother of a girl whom he deceives. Nothing could be more human than the story of Janet, her bondage and her deliverance, and the way in which the conscience of the wayward Denis is revealed.

The House of Discord

By MARY E. and
THOMAS W. HANSHEW

An intriguing murder mystery story. The House of Discord is a Scottish castle. An agitated girl, daughter of the old Laird, Sir Andrew Duggan, comes to implore the immediate help of Scotland Yard. She declares her horrid Italian step-mother is slowly but determinedly poisoning her husband, the girl's father. Also that the Italian wife means to get Ross Duggan, elder son and heir, disinherited, and get her own son Cyril put in his place. Detective Cleek takes up the case somewhat sceptically. He goes north, and finds that something is very wrong. His ultimate discovery is surprising and not at all what Miss Duggan believed. Sir Andrew is murdered in a strange way.

Desert Lovers

By KATHLYN RHODES

Author of "A Desert Cain," "The Will of Allah," etc.

The scene is laid in Egypt, where Sheila Raymond, travelling with her uncle, meets Omar Bey, a young Egyptian, who falls in love with her, ignorant of a secret connected with his birth which makes their marriage undesirable. Helen Montague, a young widow, is attracted by Sheila's cousin Kenyon, who succumbs to her beauty, but leaves her when he learns that she has caused the death of his best friend. Helen has led a somewhat unscrupulous life, but her love for Kenyon is genuine, and finally leads her, when visiting Omar's marvellous desert home, to an act of heroism which averts a terrible tragedy. The end of the book fulfils the prophecy of an Arab soothsayer, "Five shall ride over the desert towards the south but three only shall return."

The Goddess That Grew Up

By ANTHONY M. LUDOVICI

Author of "What Woman Wishes," etc.

English fathers are singularly stubborn in the opposition they show to the marriage of their daughters. Basilia Oliver is the object of her father's most impassioned worship; all the circumstances of her life conspire to concentrate the fire of her father's love and ambition wholly upon her. When the time comes for life to beckon her to a more exciting destiny than that of unpaid companion to a middle-aged parent a struggle ensues in which her first lover is dexterously put out of the way by her father. An intimate friend of the family acquires an inkling of the true state of affairs and comes to the rescue, and Basilia discovers in her second lover the boy from whom her father had jealously parted her as a child.

To the Adventurous

By E. NESBIT

Author of "The Red House," "The Lark," "A Holiday Honeymoon," etc.

E. Nesbit is admittedly mistress of the difficult art of the short story. Her last book of this order was a collection of horror-stories, worthy of inclusion in the same category as those of Ambrose Bierce or Edgar Allan Poe. In "To the Adventurous" E. Nesbit strikes a new note. "Adventures," she tells us, "are to the adventurous!" and the adventures are drawn for us from all the varied fields of life and love. The book will not make you afraid to go to bed, but you are likely to sit up till the small hours because you cannot lay it down. Each story is perfect in its kind.

Hutchinson's New Novels: 7/6 Net

City of Wonder

By E. CHARLES VIVIAN

Author of "Passion Fruit," "The Woman Tempted Me," etc.

This is an adventure story of three men who, after having faced many dangers and surmounted almost insurmountable obstacles, reach the forgotten city, Kir-Asa, hidden in some Pacific land, and the way to it guarded by savages who use poisoned arrows, and by snakes of the jungle and fierce, strong, stealthy things of the wild.

They strike a wonderfully made road, descend a wonderful chasm, and Watkins the leader, finds inscriptions made on a rock by one of his ancestors who reached Kir-Asa.

At the wonder city they meet Ag, a descendant of Watkins' relative; and Faulkner, one of the trio, and Ag's daughter, Eve, fall in love. A rival seeking vengeance, a mad king with mad sons, and a battle in which Faulkner's bride and Brent are killed, are features of this gripping romance

A Great American Novel.

Vandemark's Folly

By HERBERT QUICK

Author of "Yellowstone Nights," etc.

A good plot and a charming love-story provide intense human interest in this wonderful description of the foundation and growth of an American township before the Civil War. Vandemark Township, Monteroy County, State of Iowa, U.S.A., was established by J. T. Vandemark, who, in his stolid, faithful way, tells the reader of Virginia, the one and only girl of his heart, and Rowena, an unfortunate whom he shelters and befriends, regardless, as ever, of public opinion. Vandemark's romance and its happy ending with Virginia as his wife and mother of his children is a love-story that will please many women readers. He tells of his hard boyhood; of his life as a canal-boat driver; of his hunt for his poor mother; of how he was cheated of his full patrimony by his scoundrelly step-father; of his getting land in Iowa; and of his trek thither.

Puppets of Fate

By SELWYN JEPSON

Author of "The Qualified Adventurer."

The thrilling adventures of Paul Harper, a young man of artistic temperament, whose father, a business magnate, shares with Joyce, his secretary whom Paul adores, the belief that his son has not enough "push" in him to succeed, although the latent power is there. They are disillusioned, however, when Paul's enemy tries to deprive him of the fruits of an invention. Paul comes out on top after many exciting experiences, and it transpires afterwards that his father had a hand in the game in order to test his son's worth.

Ann

By MARY JULIAN

Author of "Where Jasmines Bloom."

Making a strong appeal to women readers, this is a character study of a girl imbued from childhood with the principle that the one aim in life is to succeed and attain material prosperity. Ann, a plain girl, has a peculiar attraction and personality, which she exploits. As a poor widow she returns to her mother's home, only to find that her circumstances are incompatible with a mother's scheme of life. She nearly wrecks her cousin's happiness by her efforts to make a new lover her slave—so regardless is she of the welfare of others. In spite of all, however, there is a better side to her, and it does not come as altogether a surprise that, having gained her object, she suddenly has a great revulsion against herself, from which springs happiness.

Peter's People

By CURTIS YORKE

Author of "The Unknown Road," etc.

Curtis Yorke's new novel tells how a young man (Peter Wistray) brings his wife to live in the same house as his mother and sisters, who are dependent on him. The arrangement leads to various complications, as Peter's family resent his being married at all, and his wife, Pamela, resents their attitude towards her. Things go from bad to worse, and tragic happenings are narrowly averted. But gradually Lady Wistray and her daughters are won over by Pamela's charm, and all ends well. Though the plot is comparatively simple, the interest is absorbing, and the characterisation and dialogue are of a high order.

The Witch Man

By MARGARET BELLE HOUSTON

A novel of the Virginia Mountains, which radiates charm and distinction, as the mystery of the "Witch Man"—and his love idyll—is unravelled among the curious mountain folk. These individualistic people, their manners, their customs, their superstitions are depicted with sympathy and understanding.

Miss Brandt : Adventuress

By MARGERY H. LAWRENCE

This is a thrilling narrative of the duel of wits between a detective and a young and beautiful adventuress who moves in the highest circles of society. The story of how Miss Brandt falls in love, but nevertheless cannot resist using her lover as an unconscious tool to aid her in robbery, and of the progress and the final result of the duel with the detective, is one of fascinating interest.

Hutchinson's New Novels. 7/6 Net

Their Chosen People By Mrs. C. A. NICHOLSON

Author of "Martin, Son of John."

A Jewish family and their relation to Gentiles is the central interest. The characters, notably Conrad and his sister, aunt, and grandmother De Costro, are quite alive. The story is written with knowledge, sympathy, and insight. It possesses therefore an attractive and moving quality quite uncommon in books or stories dealing with modern Jewish life.

Nick Nonpareil By MARIAN BOWER

Part author of "The Chinese Puzzle" and "The Green Cord."

The scene of this book is laid in one of the beautiful lakeside towns of Northern Italy. Thither His Excellency Sir Ching Wang, a Chinese Minister, has come to attend a diplomatic conference.

Arising out of this mission, there follows not only a tale of such love and revenge as is possible only to hot Italian temperaments, in which His Excellency intervenes with typical Celestial detachment, but the reappearance of Nick Nonpareil, the man who has flouted life, defied responsibility, cast off certain mystic bonds, only to find, as he is driven to reclaiming himself, that when the wheel is minded to go round, a hair from an angel's head will do as well as a hempen rope to bind the victim in it.

Hutchinson's Popular Botany

BY

A. E. KNIGHT and EDWARD STEP, F.L.S.

In Two Large Handsome Volumes, with about

1,000 beautiful Illustrations

and many Coloured Plates

each 15s. net.

The scheme of the work is to bring the whole marvellous life-story of the vegetable kingdom before the reader. It tells in popular language the secrets of flower, leaf, stem and fruit, the relationship of the plant with bird, beast, and insect, and the still more wonderful relationship of plant with plant. The work is printed on art paper, and its beautiful illustrations and coloured plates are its distinguishing feature. For those who have missed the earlier parts, back numbers are still available.

New Books for Young People

BY PRINCESS NUSRAT (ELIZABETH MARC)

Charmingly bound in uniform cloth, with attractive wrappers, 2/6 each.

Each volume has 4 beautiful Colour Plates by CHRISTIAN M. ADE and numerous other drawings by well-known children's artists.

Princess Nusrat is already well known to millions of child readers of her stories in the principal magazines, and her books are assured of the children's hearty welcome.

Timothy Tinkles : The Adventures of a Little Black Kitten with a Heart of Gold

A delightful kitten story for any and every child. All children should love Timothy and follow his adventures, which are here so beautifully told.

Tosh and Tim

Tosh is a delightful youngster with a genius for making mistakes. In the effort to please people he and his dog Tim create many disturbances.

Tosh's adventures and astounding blunders are a joy to readers, little and big, for Tosh is the genuine grubby little boy whose quaint sayings and dreadful doings delight not only children but all who love childhood.

Conrad the Cock

"Conrad the Cock" describes the adventures and experiences of the inimitable Conrad—a baby cock whose delightful *bonhomie* and good-natured but astounding capacity for mischief has already gained him thousands of nursery admirers. There is no sentimental nonsense about Conrad; nor is he any respecter of persons, as he hops through nurseryland to make the children laugh.

Doris and David All Alone By PRINCESS NUSRAT
Beautifully illustrated, with 4 Colour Plates, end papers and other drawings by CHARLES ROBINSON.

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A story full of adventure. Doris and David are the motherless children of a newspaper correspondent, a Major Deane, wounded at the Somme. The Major is suddenly sent as a special correspondent to Asia Minor.

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New Books for Young People

Maya : The Adventures of a Little Bee

By WALDEMAR BONSEL

Translated by CHARLOTTE REMFRY-KIDD

*With Colour Frontispiece and numerous illustrations by
L. R. BRIGHTWELL, F.Z.S.*

"The Adventures of Maya the Bee" has become a European classic, and no less than 483 editions have already been sold. It has been translated into nearly every foreign language, and English readers, young and old, will be entertained by this fascinating story.

Not since the days of the brothers Grimm and Hans Andersen has there been a book of similar charm. Waldemar Bonsel tells, in simple but beautiful language which every child can understand, the story of a bee's life, its meetings and adventures with grasshoppers and ladybirds, elves and butterflies, spiders and hornets. The description of animals is a revelation of the delicate miracles and unsuspected beauties of Nature. Wise ideas and a refreshing humour permeate the book, which will delight not only children (for whom it is an ideal gift-book) but all true friends of Nature.

The Goldfish Bowl

By PHYLLIS AUSTIN

*Beautifully illustrated, with 4 Colour Plates, end papers and
other drawings by CHARLES ROBINSON.*

Tells how Peggy and Timothy have a goldfish bowl and a cuckoo-clock ; they love both. Their papa and mamma are away, and two dreadful aunts are in charge. They have skin like oil-cloth and astrakhan eyebrows and bony figures, and they are as horrid as they look. Old Bootles, the factotum, used to tell them stories ; he helps them to their Goldfish Bowl adventure. They go through the doorway of a shell to the bottom of the Wonderful Sea. Among others, they meet the Queer Clocks and Davey Jones and his Locker, and the Goldfish King and Queen, and all sorts of fish. Two crabs are like the aunts.

After a delightful visit to the lovely land of wishes and dreams they arise to the surface, and then the twins wake up to find that their goldfish bowl adventures are a dream, but the aunts have vanished. Their mother and father are there, and a new baby sent by the fairies.

Told in a Garden By BERYL SEFTON SPENCER

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This charming book, in which the pretty idea that the insects, birds and plants found in the garden tell to one another their little adventures in realms of fancy and the material world, will prove a delight to children—all the more because the insects, birds and plants chosen will be so familiar to them. The beautiful drawings by Mr. Robinson will also be a great attraction.

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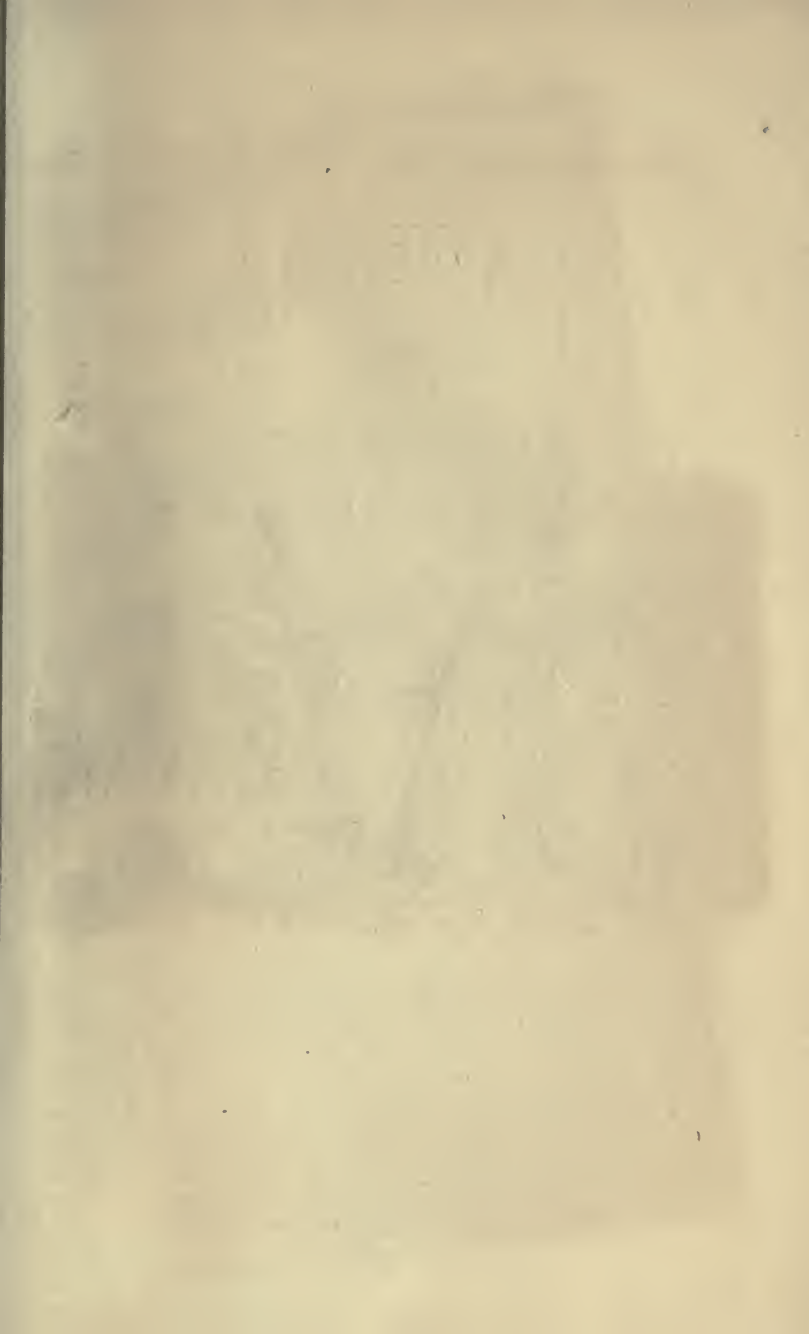
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